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**Unreconstructed:
Slavery and Emancipation
on Louisiana's Red River,
1820–1880**

A thesis presented by

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Unreconstructed: Slavery and Emancipation on Louisiana's Red River, 1820–1880

Louisiana's Red River region was shaped by and founded on the logic of racial power, the economics of slavery, and white supremacy. The alluvial soil provided wealth for the mobile, market-driven slaveholders but created a cold, brutal world for the commoditized slaves that cleared the land and cultivated cotton. Racial bondage defined the region, and slaveholders' commitment to mastery and Confederate doctrine continued after the Civil War. This work argues that when freedom arrived, this unbroken fidelity to mastery and to the inheritances and ideology of slavery gave rise to a visceral regime of violence. Continuity, not change, characterized the region. The Red River played a significant role in regional settlement and protecting this distorted racial dynamic. Racial bondage grounded the region's economy and formed the heart of white identity and black exploitation. Here, the long arcs of mastery, racial conditioning, and ideological continuities were deeply entrenched even as the nation underwent profound changes from 1820 to 1880. In this thesis, the election of 1860, the Civil War, and emancipation are not viewed as fundamental breaks or compartmentalized epochs in southern history. By contrast, on plantations along the Red River, both racial mastery and power endured after emancipation. Based on extensive archival research, this thesis considers how politics, racial ideologies, and environmental and financial drivers impacted the nature of slavery, Confederate commitment, and the parameters of freedom in this region, and by extension, the nation. Widespread Reconstruction violence climaxed with the Colfax Massacre and firmly cemented white power, vigilantism, and racial dominance within the regional culture. Freedpeople were relegated to the margins as whites reasserted their control over Reconstruction. The violent and contested nature of freedom highlighted the adherence to the power structure and ideological inheritances of slavery. From bondage to freedom, the Red River region remained unreconstructed.

In memory of my wonderful Grandma, Muriel Peller, whose incredible love, strength of character, boundless generosity, and graceful example shaped me and made my world possible.

and

For my darling husband, David John William Semmens, whose love has sustained me, and who has always supported my dreams and believed in me.

“History does not refer merely or even principally to the past. The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it—and that history is literally present in all we do.”

James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt”¹

“The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history; the backward half-look
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.
Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony
(Whether, or no, due to misunderstanding,
Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong
things,
Is not in question) are likewise permanent
With such permanence as time has. We appreciate this
better
In the agony of others, nearly experienced,
Involving ourselves, than in our own.
From our own past is covered by the currents of action,
But the torment of others remains an experience.”

T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets²

“Gentlemen: Let me say to you and to the good people of the North, I did this with no fear. I did it with honesty, and did it because I thought that such things should be reported to the people at large; but I [say] to you, and to you, gentlemen, and to the officers of the military service, if these documents is published to the world at large and my name signed to them, I cannot live no longer in the Southern States, because I would be killed by the white people of the Southern States and never allowed to travel through the South no more. But if it is necessary for to publish my name at the world at large, publish it, sink or swim, live or die.”

Henry Adams, Personal Testimony in Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States³

¹ James Baldwin, “The White Man’s Guilt,” *Ebony* 20, no. 10 (August 1965, special issue): 47–48.

² T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959): 39–40.

³ 44th Congress, House of Representatives. *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States* (NY: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 409.

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Introduction

“Red River Is So Grand”: The Long Arc of Mastery

This is a story of settlement to northwest Louisiana—the alluvial region fanning out from the banks of the Red River—driven by the expansion of the cotton South in direct response to the growing demands of the global cotton empire. Mobility for slaveholders and its denial for the enslaved defined the cotton complex of the rapidly expanding South. Using the archived letters and documentary evidence of whites who relocated their families and their slaves to this westernmost edge of the South, this thesis reconstructs the sentiments and stories behind the settlement and entrenchment of the cotton regime in this region. Their words, beliefs, and actions defined the race-based power dynamic that buttressed the regional identity on the long arc stretching from slavery through emancipation. The legacy of slavery and the Red River’s prewar cotton complex defined life and shaped white attitudes to emancipation just as mastery defined the confined contours of slavery. Whites in northwest Louisiana held steadfastly to a culture defined by cotton cultivation and built on enslaved labor. The uncensored and private thoughts of these white slaveholders clearly demonstrate their unbroken commitment to racial supremacy and how support for the slaveholding Confederacy continued to shape post-emancipation race relations. Former slaveholders throughout the Red River region restricted the pathways out of slavery for African Americans and forced freedpeople to endure a political, economic, and social order informed, defined, and built on slaveholding mastery and white supremacy.

This thesis uses the unfettered written words of Red River whites to lay bare the stark regional dynamics of white power and to reveal the centrality and importance of the legacy of mastery to the history of this understudied region. This study stretches from migration and settlement in the 1820s clear to the Colfax Massacre and the Exoduster movement in the 1880s. The 1873 Colfax Massacre saw white vigilantes who were driven by deep-set racial hatred and a pointed political agenda massacre scores of freedpeople and it remains one of the bloodiest incidents of the Reconstruction period. Colfax, however, did not occur in a vacuum. The racial enmity that drove white paramilitaries to slaughter former slaves derived from the manner in which Louisiana whites, and particularly those in the Red River region, had been acculturated and accustomed to the grossly distorted power structure of slavery and white mastery. Only by studying the long trajectory of race relations and the profit-driven plantation complex from the 1820s to the 1880s can we begin to understand how antebellum practices and conceptions of racial order indelibly shaped the postbellum world. The end of the slave period is not a breaking point in this work. Instead, it was a transitory stage for all involved and directly affected the manner in which whites responded to the tumultuous postwar era. The Civil War years—where

both the region and the slave regime are uniquely protected—influenced and solidified the commitment to white supremacy. This unbroken connective thread through these oft-regimented periods highlights the inescapable continuity and integration of this epoch. The violent actions and continued control of the political, economic, and labor spheres by whites during Reconstruction are a product of these inheritances passed down through time. Many other works choose to terminate with the Civil War or with surrender at Appomattox. Likewise, some studies pick up with Reconstruction and rely on the vast body of literature that covers the decades before to fill in the gaps. To date, only a handful of scholars have attempted to study both the slave and free eras within a single monograph and to consider both continuity and change in southern racial practice.¹ This work attempts to undertake all of these aspects in one of the most starkly exploitative and violent parts of the American South.

No historian has written a comprehensive history of slavery, emancipation, or Reconstruction along Louisiana's Red River. This thesis not only addresses a geographic lacuna within the history of slavery and emancipation in both Louisiana and the South but it additionally casts a wide lens that enables us to chart the growth and expansion of slavery in this region and the dislocations of emancipation. This work broadens and deepens our understanding of slavery in the areas of the South past the plantation belt and enriches the historiography on frontier slavery. Since this study is focused on an understudied region, this work not only fills a chasm in the literature on northern Louisiana, and Louisiana more generally, but it is uniquely able to bring the discourse forward while also filling in gaps in the history of northwest Louisiana and the Trans-Mississippi West. By focusing on this small corner of the cotton South, this work is able to examine how the region undergoes settlement, slavery, extractive cotton cultivation, unwavering commitment to the Confederacy, and resistance to Reconstruction as a unified whole, and how that unbroken adherence to systems of racial power and slavery created a postwar world rooted in white supremacy and violent control.

The Red River region is at the very edges of the cotton South and it is here that slavery lasts the longest and is unimpeded in its usage by the battles and machinations of the Civil War. It is a place where a particularly violent form of slavery is born, entrenched, and maintained; it is where American slavery is at its most extractive, most raw, and in its most brutal form. The violent antebellum nature of Red River slavery casts wide and implacable legacies that inform Reconstruction. This frontier region becomes so key to the expanding and internationally focused cotton South and to the Confederacy, and the region's integral role and position within the southern economy allows for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics of power on the cotton frontier. The geography of this region—both its physical location on a map and its

¹ This is a standard practice with many monographs, in a large part because of the sheer volume of literature on the nineteenth century South. For an example of a work that also follows a particular region from the antebellum through Reconstruction, see Susan O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge: HUP, 2007).

integration within the Trans-Mississippi West—positions this work as a significant addition to the discussion about slavery and emancipation on the frontier.

The broader trends in recent literature have focused on slavery and capitalism in the American South. This work is in sync with this trend but lays bare the actual dynamics of work, the definitive pattern of behavior, settlement, and the cotton complex that solidifies the region as a stalwart of cotton cultivation and racial slavery. Recent discourse also contains a strong focus and has often been defined by the introduction of the second slavery argument.² This line of discussion hones in on the change in the nature of exploitation coupled with the surge westward for land, a marked increase in productivity, and integration into the global markets that characterized slaveholding and settlement in the nineteenth century South. The second slavery concept also stresses that southern commodities such as cotton and sugar became global commodities, and as such, slaveholders were at the vanguard of American international development and that slavery was essential to market growth. The production of huge quantities of commodities in new areas of the rapidly expanding South, came to define the United States as a slave society and not, as it had been in the eighteenth century, as a society with slaves. This new slave society reconfigured politics, created a cyclical circuit wherein increased output yielded increased demand, and made the mobility of laborers key not just to survival of the institution of slavery but also to the “economic dynamism and capitalist character” of slavery.³ In this work, mobility of slave property, the employment of new techniques to ensure increased output, and environmental adaptation to cotton cultivation are key hallmarks of second slavery. Unreconstructed is in dialogue with the recent literature but herein the focus is on the extractive element of enslavement and cultivation on the Red River. Extraction—from land and from slave laborers—was at the heart of Red River slaveholding and it is an essential, core element of this study. To understand the transition from slavery to freedom it is crucial to understand the commodification, the land and labor grab, the maintenance of the slave regime during the Civil War, regional service in the Confederate States of America, and the perception of freedpeople as property. The Red River region was an explosive region, with a system of extraction at the core of its cotton economy and at the crux of its regional identity.

This thesis explores the enduring power and legacy of slavery. It closely examines how slavery, the transition to freedom, Reconstruction, and the post Reconstruction era were internalized, understood, and reacted to by the white and black inhabitants of the region. Under slavery, profit hungry slaveholders controlled practically every aspect of black life and built a world around the ownership and the absolute control of African American labor. Extending the scope of this work beyond the antebellum period, provides an exploration not just of the region

² Anthony Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *JSH* 75, no.3 (August 2009): 627–650. Kaye’s article is a comprehensive synthesis that advocates a reexamination of antebellum southern history as being directly impacted by and connected to the early republic period and with the wider Atlantic world.

³ Kaye, “The Second Slavery,” 633.

was a place of exploitation but also explores how that regional identity shaped and dictated the post-emancipation system and racial interactions. It is a disservice to study this region without studying the antebellum, Civil War, and Reconstruction periods together. To understand what drove this region's inhabitants—both white and black—from slavery to emancipation, it is vital to look at the long arc of mastery, control, and violence. The system of slavery was used in this region as a springboard to the post Civil War labor system. All Reconstruction actions were built on the legacy of antebellum racial hierarchy, labor systems, and methods of control. The dissolution—in theory—of this entrenched racial hierarchy by emancipation wrenched power from whites. American emancipation was the only emancipation process in Atlantic history where civil war brought, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "a new birth of freedom."⁴ Infuriated and resentful, whites reacted violently to any semblance of black freedom and exerted their power to maintain a similar level of control over blacks as they had possessed under slavery. Regional white identity was firmly rooted and characterized by the system of slavery that turned the rich red soil into an integral, market-orientated slice of the southern cotton empire. The local focus of this work offers the ability to define and examine the processes and practices of enslavement and extraction. Herein, the dynamics of enslavement, extraction, and white supremacy are laid starkly bare. Thus, this work pushes our understanding of freedom by baldly displaying how the system of slavery and settlement and the dynamic of extractive cultivation come to bear on the world of freedom.

This work builds on the already established arguments of slavery and capitalism to show that Red River slavery was thoroughly exploitative and that slaveholders moved their human chattel and their families to this region for financial gain. A major focus of this study is the examination of how and why the system of slavery and power works in this region. Here the power structure is a race-based structure firmly grounded in the domination and control of black bodies and labor. The fealty to slavery informed and was substantiated by the market-orientated nature of the Red River slaveholders, both smallholding and mid-sized slaveholders. These slaveholders concentrated on getting as much cotton to market for the best price. In this section of the South, profit was what enticed slaveholders, drove the continued settlement, and it shaped the regional slave culture. Red River slaveholders were modern and market-orientated. Thus, this work examines the connection between slavery and capitalism in terms of the economic and racial parameters of these power relations in order to understand what drove those power relations. Through this discussion of the system of power and the ways in which the economic and racial catalysts of westward expansion impacted that system, this work builds upon the arguments of slavery and capitalism to show that Red River slavery was thoroughly exploitative and that these slaveholders moved to this region for financial gain.

⁴ "The Gettysburg Address." Avalon Project, Yale University. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/gettyb.asp

The four chapters that comprise this work trace the Red River region from slavery to freedom. Chapter one showcases regional migration and the growth of the cotton empire, the second considers the slaveholding regime and the tenor of slavery, the third analyzes northwest Louisiana's economic and social regime during the Civil War and the significance of the region to the Confederacy, the fourth chapter examines the postwar period and the violent dynamics of labor, political, and racial relations. The conclusion reflects on the legacy of the Colfax Massacre, freedpeople's emigration movements from the region, and the memory of violent vigilantism. Together, these chapters reveal the violent, exploitative world of Red River enslavement and expose the enduring centrality of slavery and racial mastery to southern white and black identities.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the Red River was a powerful, inescapable, destructive, capricious, wealth-giving waterway that played a central role in the prosperity of the region and the hardships of cotton cultivation. The river determined the fortunes of all who lived off its banks and while it connected the region with the wider commercial world, it could also sever it from contact. Indeed, the river was vital in shaping the region and preserving its distorted racial dynamic.⁵ Environmental factors played a significant role in the unfolding of history for inhabitants along the Red River. The clearing of the Red River to frequent and scheduled commercial shipping opened the region to export cotton farming and bound the region with the cotton and slave markets of New Orleans. Keeping the Red River clear and accessible to New Orleans and, by proxy, the world's cotton markets was of utmost importance to the region's market-oriented slaveholders and thus copious energy, funds, and labor were devoted to clearing the morass of driftwood and silt that comprised the famous Red River Raft. During the Civil War, the Raft and the high waters of the Red hermetically sealed the region; Union naval forces were unable to penetrate the region in 1864. Since the river was impassable for most of the Civil War, the Red River made northwest Louisiana indispensable to the Confederacy by providing cotton for export, food, and medicine for the army. The river made the region the last holdout of the Confederacy; it would be the bastion of stalwart commitment and the last place to surrender in 1865. However, just as the Red River provided lifeblood to the cotton economy and served as a protective shield during the war, the river carried destruction and disease both before and after the war and its mercurial depths would become watery graves for many freedpeople killed by white vigilantes during Reconstruction. The Red was a driving force in the region and the environmental narrative of this indomitable river is a significant factor in this story of dominating white supremacy.

⁵ For another book that investigates the role of nature in shaping the settlement of a region see Matthew Klinge, *Emerald City: An Environmental History of Seattle* (New Haven: YUP, 2007). For an excellent investigation of the central role of the Mississippi River see Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and its People from Hernando Desoto to Hurricane Katrina* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

This is not a story of good versus evil. It is the story of the settlement, cultivation, and unbroken commitment to slavery in an understudied region of the American South. While this is a history that inescapably deals with violence, control, profit seeking, commodification of other human beings, black subjugation, and white power, this work approaches this era and its historical actors on their own terms and without any preordained certainties. The aim of this undertaking is to understand the motivations, mindsets, and elements that caused these historic peoples to act the way they did and to unpack the implications and legacies of their actions.⁶ Just like the Colfax Massacre, events never occur in a vacuum and the role of history is to attempt to understand and interpret the pressures, triggers, and behavioral patterns exhibited by individuals and groups. As this thesis makes clear, change—most notably the dramatic transformation from slave to free labor—defined the history of southern race relations while longstanding continuities also shaped racial values and attitudes as slavery transitioned to freedom in the postwar decades. Nowhere was this truer than in Louisiana's Red River region. During the antebellum period a slaveholding culture emerged founded upon the logic of racial power, the economics of slavery, and white supremacy. The Red River region was shaped by slavery and this white regional identity was cultivated while slaves cultivated bountiful cotton fields. That culture and its associated values endured as slavery gave way to freedom during the Civil War and Reconstruction.

By studying the ideological and operational bases of slavery and emancipation, this work demonstrates that the language of mastery and of power held enduring significance for blacks and whites in this plantation district. Freedom, when it finally came, was accordingly carved and contoured by the values and ideological inheritance of slavery. Even when the Civil War and emancipation destroyed the legal, social, and economic basis of slavery, planters, landowners, overseers, and regional farmers did not abandon their commitment to racial power. Those values were too deeply ingrained and tightly entwined with the regional white identity to be jettisoned. Instead, they remained at the heart of white identity and white control of black labor throughout the Reconstruction period and into the twentieth century.

Although scholars of racial violence and white power have previously published on the reign of terror in northwest Louisiana during Reconstruction, this study is the first to examine the transition from slavery to emancipation and to explain how white, racial mastery emerged and endured. It is based on archival research into letters, diaries, plantation manuscript collections, and dozens of ancillary sources that span settlement, plantation cultivation, Confederate resistance, and Reconstruction violence. Most of these sources were gathered from the well-stocked repositories of Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. Additional sources were collected from Noel Memorial Library at Louisiana State

⁶ On the importance of approaching the study and writing of history on the past's own terms and the three qualities for writing good history see Edward Countryman, "A Note For Students," in John David Smith, ed., *When Did Southern Segregation Begin?* (Boston: Bedford, 2002), ix-x.

University, Shreveport and from the Colfax Public Library. The collections at Hill encompass and capture the great majority of sources pertinent to a regional, Louisiana study. However, as is often the case when studying the nineteenth-century, the archives house the documents that have survived or been donated. There are many environmental and personal factors—such as flood, fires at Caddo Parish courts that destroyed many of their records at the end of the 1890s, and families that did not keep or destroyed documents at the request of deceased members—that may have impacted the breadth of primary source documents available from the Red River region. There may also be further documents in private or family collections that have not been made public or accessible to historians.

Certain other limitations exist to the available sources. The majority of the documents available are from the more elite slaveholders in the region. These mid-sized slaveholders constitute a disproportionate voice within the sources because they were literate, left sources behind, and had the resources—both financial and time wise—to maintain correspondence and ledgers. These slaveholders would have been in the position to employ an overseer to help with the daily management. Thus, they would have had the time to keep plantation records and a basic amount of literacy with which to keep a diary or write letters to other members of their family or social circle. Many of the smaller slaveholders and yeomen farmers who populated this region did not have the time to keep or maintain any records, as many of them worked alongside their slaves or acted as overseer. Frequently, small slaveholders and white yeomen were illiterate or had only a rudimentary level of literacy. Thus, the voice of the more elite Red River slaveholders is overwhelming in this narrative.

This skew in the sources also highlights an element prevalent in many correspondences and family papers from the nineteenth century. Particularly among literate and somewhat moneyed whites, there was a performative element to letter writing, even between family members. Certain things would not be discussed in letters under any circumstance and many letters follow an accepted layout and order of topics. Letters from men and women also feature different subjects and put on display separate performative parts. This performative aspect is another reason why the letters from regional slaveholders detail very little about the lives of their slaves; violence was an accepted element of slaveholding life and not significant enough to mention in a letter, and the daily life of slaves was inconsequential. What was important was cotton cultivation, the expansion of slavery, adherence to racial hierarchy, political and personal support of the Confederacy, and the strong, unified push towards white supremacy as a way to redraw the lines of control in the postbellum period.

Enslaved Americans were not entirely voiceless, but no great cache of WPA interviews exists for the Red River region as it does for other locations in the slave South. Red River slaveholders ignored the African American cultural presence. For them slaves were laboring bodies defined by race and reduced from personhood to chattel property. The voices of white

slaveholders dominate this regional narrative precisely because slavery, cotton cultivation, and the plantation regime impacted upon and imprinted racial dynamics. The inescapable and lamentable absence of African Americans in the historical narrative reflects how routinized and ordinary slavery was within the minds of white slaveholders, how irrelevant the private lives of slaves was to their owners, and explains how notions of white supremacy were integrated into the fiber of this region. Blacks were commodified and monetized during slavery, perceived of as repositories of wealth that could also be used to secure loans, and referred to as animals and interchangeable hands throughout the antebellum and postwar periods. Even when the war ended, ex-slaveowners continued to refer to their former property as slaves and as laboring, productive objects that cultivated cotton.

This overtly cold, brutal, and exploitative regional perception and attitude toward blacks created the most oppressive, racist, and undiluted slave regime in the American South. Paternalism was conspicuous by its absence.⁷ In this region, slaves are seen as brute labor and it is to the Red River that those curious about the extraordinary brutality of antebellum enslavement must go in order to see slavery at its very worst. This work does not follow the path of some recent scholarship to expose the cold, stark, commodified world in which Red River slaves lived, worked, and died. Instead, this work focuses on the exploitative, raw, and market-focused structure that made up the dynamic of racial slavery in the Red River region.

As an organizing structure for slavery studies, paternalism was used largely for examining the southeast and long-settled regions. It was a framework that originally worked well to further investigate enslavement in these entrenched regions—the same areas from which many slaveholders would leave to settle the Red River—along the coast with large, well-established holdings with clear delineations between field and ‘big house’ slaves. However, first and foremost, the Genovese legacy of paternalism is flawed on the frontier, where, overwhelmingly, the holdings are small to medium in size. As will be discussed in more detail herein, outward displays of wealth and gentrification were not of utmost importance to settlers of the Red River. They focused on reinvesting their profits into the purchase of more slaves or additional land. The structure of punishment in Red River is not muted in any way. This work

⁷ For discussion of the geography of the plantation as akin to a carceral landscape see chapter eight in Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: HUP, 2013). See also Jeffrey Young, “Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation, 1833–1867: Paternalism Amidst ‘a good Supply of Disease and Pain,’” *JSH* 59, no. 4 (November 1993): 673–706; Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordon, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (NY: Vintage, 1976); Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (NY: CUP, 2011). Genovese’s *Roll, Jordon, Roll* is a seminal text in southern studies and in slavery studies. It is in this work that Genovese puts forth the idea of paternalism as a way of organizing and understanding interactions between slaves and slaveholders. Though he moves away from the idea briefly during his long career, he returns back to and upholds it in his final work, *Fatal Self-Deception*. Paternalism argues that slavery is a negotiated space between the slaveholder and his slaves. Slavery was, according to Genovese, a pre-capitalist institution, and slaveholders envisioned themselves as benevolent paternalists that held the best interest of their slaves at heart. The paternalist ideology of “my family, black and white” very much depended on the ability of the white part of the “family” to extract labor from the black part by threatening to destroy the black family by separation and sale. According to Genovese, slaves used paternalism to ameliorate the harshness of slavery and build security. They could, for example, control the work pace, grow their own vegetables on plots behind their cabins, or have marriages recognized. They also could use paternalism to resist master’s power and create their own culture within the plantation system. Throughout his work, Genovese asserts that paternalism is rooted in the political economy of antebellum slavery and that through marginal reforms and emotional transformations, slaveholders attempted to humanize slavery while, at the same time, consolidating its political position.

reinforces the newer trends within slavery studies because if paternalism existed at all, and this work does not believe it existed, it was certainly a mask and it had restrictive and real limits as an emotive language.

Slaves in the Red River region are commodified and are seen by slaveholders only in terms of their labor output. Paternalism is not part of the dynamic in this part of the cotton South. It is not part of how slaveholders viewed their slaves or how enslaved viewed their masters. For the individuals that settled and established holdings in the Red River, their focus remained on getting as much financial gain from the land and out of their slave labor. This region thrives upon and is firmly built upon an extractive, cold, and brutal form of slavery with no place for paternalism. Violence and hard labor defined Red River slavery and conditioned the legacy and tenor of post emancipation race relations.

These slaveholders and slaves did not live in a world of fatal self-deception. This historian does not doubt that resistance and accommodation occurred in the slave South, and there may have been a small amount of this in the Red River. However, the evidence of black agency and resistance is extremely limited. For instance, the examples of resistance during the Civil War uncovered during the archival research done for this work can be counted on one hand. There is no real substantive, deep, or conclusive evidence of agency, neighborhoods, or internal economy. The recent settlement of the region, particularly during the 1830s and 1840s, means that there are no real slave neighborhoods, which presents another impediment to agency. Evidence that would support escaping, even as a means to protest work or to limit work hours, is minimal. This is made more acute because there was no real, concrete place or natural hideout for the slaves to run or escape to; the geography of the region is so vastly different from the southern portion of Louisiana, and indeed many parts of the southeast, that escape and survival in the woods or swamps was impossible as the land sweeping up from the riverbanks is largely flat. While none of this irrefutably proves that these elements of slave life and work did not occur in the Red River region, there is no evidence to support these claims and it would be spurious to conjecture. In fact, the systematic absence of black agency throughout the historical record tells us quite a bit about the slaveholders. It underscores very boldly the type of slavery practiced in this region. The lack of black agency prior to the Civil War led to the same void during the war and in the postwar period.

When federal authorities declared emancipation, Red River whites reacted by consistently restricting the parameters of freedom and hemming in the pathways out of slavery for ex-bondspeople. A postbellum regime defined by racial control and violence emerged restricting black mobility and freedmen's access to the ballot box and to the political arena. By 1874, the year after the Colfax Massacre, the region's freedpeople were pushed to the margins of the body politic and denied electoral participation, particularly after white Democrats achieved home rule in 1877. Occasionally, black voices can be heard against the wall of white

noise created by slaveholders, free white farmers, and their progeny. Glimpses, in their own voices, of the experience of the region's slaves and freedpeople were caught through the words of Solomon Northup, a few ex-slaves in short WPA interviews, the testimonies of violence catalogued by former bondspeople in *Uses of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, and Henry Adams, a literate former slave and Union soldier who promoted black exodus and colonization after the Civil War.⁸ Plantation records and slaveholding family papers are deployed heavily in this work—all of which were consulted at archives in Louisiana—and these accounts, personal letters, and ledgers have been combed over to recover aspects of the black historical record. The crude lists and plantation orders kept by slaveholders reveal precious little about the slaves' world, however, they do expose the extremely restricted boundaries of black life in northwest Louisiana. Little about the daily life of the enslaved is imparted to us by the enslaved themselves, but this does not mean that slaves in northwest Louisiana lacked humanity or agency. It would be spurious to state that Red River slaves partook, planned, or collectively resisted the slave regime in the manner that has been persuasively utilized in many social histories of the South because the evidence to support this activity simply does not exist. Such conclusions do not minimize African American agency, preservation of their humanity, or the efforts of enslaved people to shape their lives but they reveal the exponential, constant, visceral level of violence in northwest Louisiana. Agency, in the "canonical, way to frame an argument" that is used to display the ways that enslaved people "strove to preserve their humanity" is not something that must necessarily be bestowed by the historian. The enslaved African Americans who cultivated the sweeping cotton fields of northwest Louisiana were active participants in their own existence and history who were intensely conditioned by the extractive, dehumanizing, and commodified slave regime, but who can not be isolated from the pressures and the societal limitations of their era.⁹

The dynamics and tenor of the region created a world that restricted the opportunities to hear black voices. The presence of African American voices in the Red River historical record are limited to occasions of violent reassertion of mastery or instances wherein freedpeople

⁸ Sue Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup: Twelve Years a Slave* (Longboat Key: Telemachus Press, 2013); Ronnie Clayton, *Mother Wit: The Ex-Slave Narratives of the Louisiana Writers' Project* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); 44th Congress, House of Representatives. *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States* (NY: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969).

⁹ Walter Johnson, "On Agency," *JSHis* 37, no. 1, Special Issue (Autumn 2003): 114. Johnson's article asks historians to think about what they mean and what they end up missing when they ask the now standard questions associated with the agency as a "master trope of the new social history (113)." He critiques the idea that agency is something that needs to be granted—a critique that this author agrees with—and reminds us as historians to bear in mind the confines of the times that impact the actions of historical actors. He points, notably, that the way we have gone about asking whether African Americans are agents of their own destiny "reproduces the terms and analytical limits" that are "framed by the white-supremacist assumptions" that made it possible and necessary to ask these questions in the first place. Another article which tackles the issue of agency within antebellum studies is William Dusenberre, "Power and Agency in Antebellum Slavery," *American Nineteenth Century History* 12, no. 2 (2011): 139–148. This is more of an overview piece that asks historians to question and recalibrate the limits of agency when recovering the master-slave relationship. He grounds his questions in two assertions: a) he does not think that historians need to assert that planters were capitalist because that depends on how capitalism is defined, but that these were men who were businessmen and who owned and invested in slaves to enhance their own economic and social position; b) planters were self-interested business people and created a harsh regime. The only way slaves could express discontent was through nonviolent dissidence. He then queries agency in terms of how closely slave religion paralleled the beliefs and practices of white southern evangelicals by 1860, the extent to which slaves resisted forces that aimed to weaken family institutions and bonds, the extent of community solidarity, and slave morals.

pushed back at the obstacles to the pathways out of slavery. The low and barely audible murmur of slave and freedpeople's voices within this story provided the impetus to understand the violent relationships that supported slave and post-emancipation societies where racial power literally and figuratively erased black speech from the archival record. To expose slavery's inner dynamics, this thesis explores the motivations for settling northwest Louisiana and the cold, brutal form of enslavement that emerged on the banks of the Red. It explains how the region's Confederate history provided a preamble to postwar race relations. In so doing, this work aims to provide context and an explanation for the silence of the enslaved and freedpeople. It is only through an understanding of regional dynamics that the task of excavating the black and white experience along Red River can begin.

Recent trends in secondary literature have helped shape this thesis. Today few scholars question the significance of cotton expansion and exploitative cultivation regimes to southern economic development and no scholar can underestimate the marketplace demands that fueled slavery's expansion. Indeed, most recent scholarship stresses the exploitative thrust of American slavery and the centrality of slave labor and the cotton complex to the emergence of a modern and capitalist American economy. This scholarly trajectory builds upon the arguments of slavery and capitalism developed by James Oakes, Eugene Genovese, Stanley Engerman, and Robert Fogel.¹⁰ Today, the "slavery debates" have largely ended and practically every school accepts the principle that on the one hand non-market labor relations defined slavery while on the other capitalism, racial bondage, and modernity advanced together. As Michael O'Brien observes, contemporary slavery scholars principally divide over whether modern elements were "determinative or marginal" in southern antebellum history.¹¹ This work develops both of these strands of interpretation to display that in the Red River slavery was thoroughly exploitative and that slaveholders who migrated there did so with the expectation of financial gain from the fertile soil and the toil of their slaves.

Alongside these arguments, another intervention herein is that this long arc of mastery and power shaped and impacted the people and events of the Red River, and by extension, the nation. Unlike many histories of slavery and emancipation which either begin or end in 1861 with the onset of war, 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, or 1865 with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment prohibiting slavery, this study is set apart from these recent monographs in its long-reaching periodization that askews the conventional break during the Civil War years. Building upon the work of scholars such as Thavolia Glymph and Susan O'Donovan, this work looks at the decades from 1820–1880 as intertwined and as a composite

¹⁰ The most recent additions to the literature deal with the exploitative and capitalistic aspects of slavery and the world of cotton. They include Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (NY: Basic Books, 2014); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2014); Joshua Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams: A Story of Capitalism and Slavery in the Age of Jackson* (Athens: UGA, 2012).

¹¹ Michael O'Brien, Afterword in Barnes, Schoen, Towers, eds., *The Old South's Modern Worlds: Slavery, Region, and Nation in the Age of Progress* (NY: OUP, 2011), 306.

whole. Importantly, this thesis does not consider the Civil War and emancipation as fundamental breaks in the history of the South. The collapse of the world's largest slaveholding power arrived by military force and was a vast transformative episode. However, to fully understand the power of the plantation complex and its entrenched, racist cultures, this thesis follows the continuities across time to appreciate the enduring power of slavery while studying the promise of freedom. Slaveholders, as James Roark argued in *Masters Without Slaves*, brought all the values of enslavement to their comprehension and understanding of a world without slavery, and this topic is addressed in detail in chapter four.¹²

Finally, although scholars of racial violence and white power have previously published on the reign of terror in northwest Louisiana during Reconstruction, this study is the first to examine the transition from slavery to emancipation and to explain how white, racial mastery emerged and endured in postwar vigilantism. Although unpleasant and often unpalatable, the voices of slaveholders and white racists ring clearly throughout these pages. Collectively, they articulate the words and sentiments of defiant slaveholders and unreconstructed bigots. This thesis lays bare their worldview and reveals a world constructed of a brutal combination of racism, power, and mastery.

To understand the emotional and practical legacies of slavery in northwest Louisiana it is imperative to begin with the fact that slavery was about power. Power—racial, economic, and personal—was never equally distributed between owner and owned or between former slaveholders and the newly emancipated. Under slavery, power rested completely in the grips of whites and in freedom, power remained heavily tilted to white favor. On the rare occasions that African Americans asserted real, substantive power—notably during Radical Reconstruction—Red River whites responded violently and vituperatively. Thus, the making and learning of racial and economic power is a central artery of this work. As the first two chapters demonstrate, the successful securing of profits required expansive production and capitalistic exploitation in combination with racial power and authority. Racial power undergirded every aspect of Red River life, from the loans extended by banks to slaveholders, to the levees built by slaves, to the cotton planted and picked by thousands of field hands. The political leanings of the region were solidly pro-slavery and the deep emotional and financial investment of Red River slaveholders in slaveholding made it ideally suited to become the Confederate capital of the Trans-Mississippi West. Former northwest Louisiana slaveholders remained invested in the plantation establishment, in the plantation system, and in the Confederacy after guns fell silent in April 1865. This loyalty to power and racial control remained firmly rooted in the wake of the Civil War.

¹² O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008); James Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (NY: Norton, 1977).

When the supportive beam of slavery was pulled out from under the house of Dixie and whites in northwest Louisiana found themselves without slaves, forced to take an oath of allegiance, and draw up labor contracts with their former chattel, they relied on racial hierarchy and power to redraw the lines of control and dominance. Race remained the key sculptor of the regional tenor and identity. Violence and racial authority were utilized to enforce the parameters of black freedom, to realign and reassert white identity, and to maintain the regime of white control and mastery throughout the Red River region. Racial power was the crux of white regional identity and it is at the core of this study. As chapters three and four detail, the explosive and visceral events of the post-Civil War period were a product of a long process of conditioning in the region. History does not occur in compartmentalized sections, neatly packaged for later scholarly reflection. Politics, racial ideologies, environmental, and financial drivers all shape a region and impact the manner in which inhabitants act. Subsequent regional and national events are built upon a foundation that has been established, inherited, and learned over the years. A major intervention of this work is to show how the numerous long arcs and ideological continuities endured even while the nation's politics dramatically changed from the Jacksonian period to the end of Grant's presidency. Among the most resilient of those arcs was that of the culture of slaveholding mastery and its corollary, an ethos of undiminished and unwavering racial power. Indeed, as this thesis illustrates, it is the unbroken connective threads through these oft-regimented periods that highlight the inescapable continuities that endured from the 1820s to the 1880s.

Readers will notice that two groups are largely absent from this study: non-slaveholding whites and Native Americans. Their absence is a result of the parameters of this work and the constraints of primary sources. Non-slaveholding and poor whites, who lived in northern Louisiana, left very limited written documents and few of their words were present in the archival holdings utilized in this study. Since their voices and their thoughts were not expressly stated in the written record they have been omitted until this work can be expanded to include still further archival research. Native Americans are absent from this thesis simply because their story is not within the scope of this work. A monograph on the Native Americans of this region and their displacement is needed but it remained impossible to whittle that history to fit within the confines of this work. It is a story deserving of a dedicated text. Readers should also note that all spelling, punctuation, and emphasis present in the original archival sources have been maintained in the quotations utilized in this work.

In a short introduction before his personal testimony in *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, Henry Adams declared that the regional penchant for racial violence "should be reported to the people at large." He gave his testimony "with no fear" but fully aware that the racial climate and values of the Red River region meant that he would exchange

his safety in this pursuit of justice.¹³ His position as a community leader, a Republican, and an ex-Union soldier made him additionally hated by regional whites. Adams's testimony, like those of many other freedpeople, sheds light on the violent, contested nature of freedom along the Red River. Freedpeople faced violence from white supremacists for their participation in politics, for attempting to vote, for wanting the freedom to travel without a pass, for wanting to only work contracted hours, and to receive wages. However, the post-emancipation Red River carried the same social, economic, racial, and labor ideologies as during the antebellum. The planter identity and planter power that had forged the region from the early days of settlement continued to buttress a regional commitment to white power and white supremacy throughout Reconstruction. The Red River region was shaped by an unbroken adherence to the power structure of slavery, to racialized power, and mastery. The enduring legacy of slavery was, to use the words of James Baldwin, the "great force of history" that was "literally present" in both slavery and freedom and would create a region dedicated to white supremacy.¹⁴ As this thesis concludes, from slavery to freedom, the Red River region remained completely unreconstructed.

¹³ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 409.

¹⁴ James Baldwin, "White Man's Guilt," *Ebony* 20 no. 10 (August 1965, special issue): 47–48.

Chapter One

“What Good Lands Were”: Settlement and Slaveholding

D. B. Allen, an early settler, arrived in Shreveport, Louisiana in November 1851. Like many slaveholders from the Upper and Lower South, Allen had traveled from familiar terrain in central Tennessee to the farthest edge of the cotton frontier in the hopes of gaining wealth. Effusive with optimism, Allen wrote his mother in Wilson County, Tennessee: “speaking of the Red River, I never knew until I saw the lands upon its banks what good lands were.” “I had heard of the immense cotton fields that grow in this country,” he gushed, “but they never gave me an idea . . . when I beheld the cotton I was perfectly amazed, and what was stranger to me than all was the colour of the soil it is almost perfectly red resembling very much the very purest clay banks that you see in wilson county.”¹ This exuberant reaction to the rich soils and the prospects of the country was common among Red River settlers and embodied much of the zeal towards settlement. This thirsty, determined, and continuous migration to northwest Louisiana began in the aftermath of the War of 1812 and did not diminish until the 1850s. What those settlers sought was what Allen encountered: “immense fields of cotton higher than my head on my horse.”²

Allen was a member of the large contingent of western settlers who embodied western expansion. Removal of the Raft, a dense wooded tangle in the Red River, ignited frontier-market integration and heightened the region’s appeal. Chain migrations from the interior Upper and Lower South brought settlers keen on profit to the rough-hewn area, where they set about controlling the land. This aggressive land settlement reflected Jacksonian conquest and the acquisition of land remained a key driver of westward expansion to gain wealth. Slaveholding settlers to Red River were both capitalist and modern. They belonged to the “market sector of the South’s dual economy” and viewed fertile soil and slave labor as a means to produce large cotton crops and generate wealth.³ Alongside their slaves, these white settlers felled trees to clear cotton fields, built rudimentary cabins, and quickly planted a cotton crop. Slaveholder determination to “enter a market economy” and the advantageous position of the Red River to the major trading waterway reinforced the “parallel conviction that enslaved labor was the

¹ D.B. Allen to “Dear Mother,” November 13, 1851, D.B. Allen Letter, Mss. 3572, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collection, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA (hereafter LLMVC).

² D.B. Allen to “Dear Mother,” November 13, 1851, D.B. Allen Letter, Mss. 3572, LLMVC.

³ Harry Watson, “Slavery and Development in the South,” in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: UVP, 1996), 49. The Jacksonian period is from the mid 1830s until 1854, though Jacksonian democracy began to gain traction in the mid-1820s. For Jacksonian era discussion see Harry Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (NY: HW, 1990); Lawrence Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (NY: OUP, 1989); Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (NY: Norton, 2005); Edward Pessen, “The Egalitarian Myth and the American Social Reality: Wealth, Mobility, and Equality in the “Era of the Common Man,”” *AHR* 76, no. 4 (October 1971): 989–1034.

optimal method of generating wealth.”⁴ The transformation of this region into the cotton frontier exemplified the commitment to westward expansion and wealth accumulation.

This profit-driven settlement yielded a rough culture that shaped the contours of regional slavery. The strong concentration of commodity-crop production and entrenched slave labor drove the explosion of cotton-grown wealth across the expanding South. The manner in which settlement unfolded in the Red River and the capitalist nature of this expansion underscores the true composition and the dependent relationship of slavery and capitalism in one of the most dynamic, exploitative regions of the South. The Red River region exemplified the settlement of the Trans-Mississippi West, offering vast opportunities for its rapacious slaveholders and misery for slaves. Crude yet thoroughly embedded in national and transatlantic commerce, slavery etched its own indelible foundation, entrenching ideological, cultural, and material identities that would shape the options and prospects of freedom for the region.⁵ These slaveholders leveraged the power to “command people as property” to relocate their chattel to burgeoning regions and to organize their labor resources as they saw fit. The internal slave trade was propelled westward as yeoman and planter demands for more hands increased. In this fast-paced progression west, as Brian Schoen notes, “slavery advanced, rather than hindered, southern agricultural development,” and allowed for the movement of labor and spread of cotton-fueled profitability across the breadth of the South.⁶ This chapter details the transformation of the Red River region from un-mastered terrain into cotton country by small slaveholders and planters. The creation of this cotton south, the challenges presented to settlers, and their environmental mastery form an important component of this chapter. Lastly, this chapter investigates the interregional slave trade, its essential role in the growth of the labor force, the composition of the slave population, and the settling of the westernmost finger of the cotton south. As the area moved from frontier into a settled plantation region, land-hungry white settlers effected environmental changes and exerted control over the land that turned the soil profitable through the unceasing toil of slaves who worked the sprawling cotton fields.

The terrain that Allen enthused about was defined by the Red River, a major alluvial pathway that originates in northwestern Texas. The long, circumnavigating waterway then begins its eastward course dividing into two forks in the Texas panhandle, one of which delineates the Texas-Oklahoma border. The river meanders across the entire breadth of this border, referred to by Allen’s contemporaries as the Great American Desert, then decidedly turns southward to form the Texas-Arkansas border, curling around the town of Texarkana before entering into northern Louisiana near Ida. The river passes through Shreveport and

⁴ Joyce Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit: Agricultural Innovation and Modernity in the Lower South, 1730–1815* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1993), 278; Barnes, Schoen, and Towers, eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds*.

⁵ Three new works address this dynamic and interdependence between slavery and capitalism: Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*; Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told*.

⁶ Brian Schoen, “The Burdens and Opportunities of Interdependence: The Political Economies of the Planter Class,” in Barnes, Schoen, Frank Towers, eds., *The Old South’s Modern Worlds*, 69; Seth Rockman, “The Future of Civil War Era Studies: Slavery and Capitalism,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 (2012), online supplement.

Bossier City before turning south and descending towards Alexandria, Louisiana. There it joins the Atchafalaya River, a tributary of the Mississippi, before draining into the vast and marshy Atchafalaya Basin on the Gulf of Mexico's shores.⁷ Named after the rich soil on the river's banks, the Red River was a major river artery and an avenue of commercial growth with New Orleans that made northwest Louisiana valuable to New Orleans merchants and migrating planters both for its agricultural and trade potential. The alluvial soil proffered an extremely fertile corridor that attracted settlers like D. B. Allen.

German travel writer Friedrich Gërstacker noted that the banks along the Red were so densely planted with cotton that it seemed "covered with snow."⁸ But this valuable tributary was by no means easily navigable. Until 1833, the Red River Raft—a one hundred and sixty mile morass of tangled driftwood, detritus, and silt—clogged the channel beyond Natchitoches and made navigation upstream difficult and hazardous.⁹ In 1833 seasoned keelboatman Henry Shreve began the years-long process of clearing the Raft, which extended above and below his namesake town. Dredging the river bottom, using snag boats to break obstacles, removing logs, and clearing the river of drifting lumber, Shreve and his contemporaries deepened the Red River and opened it to full commercial operation in 1838. Prior to 1817, "commerce from New Orleans to the upper country was carried in about twenty barges" and transportation usually only occurred once a year. With the opening of the Red River and its connection to the cotton kingdom via New Orleans, the number of steamboats operating along the Red River increased from thirty-six to over one hundred, resulting in a Red River-to-New Orleans trade network valued at approximately \$100 million. The trade was so lucrative that one Shreveport family built a number of "small, maneuverable riverboats" that were adapted to the river's "special condition."¹⁰ Integrating the Mississippi and Red River was an enduring achievement that transformed the region.

Slaveholders who settled in this region manifested a desire to dominate all aspects of the world in which they lived. They set about ecological control of the Red River and the surrounding natural environment with the same mastery with which they controlled their slaves. Centered on the burgeoning market town of Shreveport, the Red River cotton region that settlers like Allen flocked to incorporated a lengthy zone of agricultural productivity that extended from Alexandria, in the midsection of Louisiana, to Shreveport and beyond into eastern Texas and southwest Arkansas. This long, crooked finger of land included the parishes of Caddo, Bossier, Red River, DeSoto, Sabine, Natchitoches, Rapides, and Grant and the adjacent counties in neighboring states. The Louisiana Purchase more than doubled the landmass of the young

⁷ <http://www.lsus.edu/offices-and-services/community-outreach/red-river-watershed-management-institute/about-the-basin>

⁸ Irene Di Maio, trans., *Gërstacker's Louisiana: Fiction and Travel Sketches from Antebellum Times Through Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2006), 28.

⁹ E. W. Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi; or Gould's History of River Navigation* (Saint Louis: Nixon Jones, 1889), 210.

¹⁰ C. Geoffrey Mangin, "Clearing the Great Raft: Impetus for Economic Growth in Louisiana's Red River Valley, 1830–1860," *NLHJ* 31(Fall 2000): 37; Robert Gudmestad, *Steamboats and the Rise of the Cotton Kingdom* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2011), 25.

United States and provided ample room for enthusiastic expansion of the cotton kingdom and slavery. By October 1819, the federal government had sold almost five million acres of Deep South land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase, frequently at higher prices than land in other parts of the expanding American West. The opening of this new cotton frontier served as a clarion call to settlers from all economic backgrounds. These individuals brought with them capital and an established framework for agriculturally fuelled economic success.¹¹ In turn, slave-based cotton and sugar production boomed as slaveholders took advantage of readily available land and labor, acquired in the main through the interregional slave trade, to develop a fully commercialized plantation society.¹²

Those Jacksonian Americans eager to profit from the newly dredged rivers, steamboat packets, and larger upriver vessels “did not stand in awe of a river” or its “forests of snags.”¹³ Instead, they reordered the natural environment. Breaking the raft, which had effectively acted as a barrier to “settlement and trade” enabled planters and settlers to realize the region’s cotton potential.¹⁴ The first of Shreve’s engineering works ensured that water from the Red began to flow directly to the Mississippi. The following year, after removing the rotting sections of the raft, work began to dislodge the solid and entangled mass. This “sent tremendous amounts of driftwood downriver to lodge in the mouth of the Atchafalaya,” which triggered a series of navigation problems.¹⁵ The clearing of the river blockage, in conjunction with the deepening of the channel, upset the river system and diverted essential overflow water from surrounding lakes into the Gulf. Periods of low water rendered upstream navigation impossible a few times a year. The raft, moreover, proved stubborn and occasionally expanded. Four months after Shreve finished his clearing project a new 2,300-foot raft formed and reached twenty miles long by 1841. Continued projects inevitably followed to keep the river clear and easily navigable. Slaveholders along the Red River provided much of the capital to maintain the river navigation throughout the antebellum period as policymakers argued over allocation of resources for internal improvements.¹⁶ In spite of environmental obstacles, the promise of the region held in the productivity of its soils and the commercial value of Red River trade continued to lure settlers like Allen to the region.

¹¹ Malcolm Rohrbough, *Trans-Appalachian Frontier: People, Societies, and Institutions, 1775–1850*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: IUP, 2008): 274.

¹² Rothman, *Slave Country*, 170–1.

¹³ Gudmestad, *Steamboats*, 127. See also Morris, *The Big Muddy*.

¹⁴ Gudmestad, *Steamboats*, 130.

¹⁵ Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 99, 101. The Red River would not be tamed to human satisfaction until 1970. Today’s Red River bears little resemblance to the surging and ever-changing river of yesteryear, though it is still incredibly powerful and dominating. For an in-depth look at the role of nature in developing a city in a post-nineteenth century context and a discussion of nature as a physical agent, see Klinge, *Emerald City*.

¹⁶ Mangin, “Clearing the Great Raft,” 36; Karen Haymans, “The Decline of the Steamboat on the Red River,” *NLHJ* 8 (Winter 1977): 78; Paul Paskoff, *Troubled Waters: Steamboat Disasters, River Improvements, and American Public Policy, 1821–1860* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2007), 109.



Foot of Raft #7 a few miles north of Shreveport in 1873, Mrs. John S. Kyser Collection, Mss. 1391, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.



Shagboat "AID", a few miles north of Shreveport, cleaning up remnants of the Raft in 1873, Mrs. John S. Kyser Collection, Mss. 1391, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, LSU Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

Other migrants from within the cotton South similarly found the Red River alluring. In 1838, siblings Bennett Dickson and Margaret Dickson Whitworth decided to move from Alabama to northwest Louisiana. Bennett and eldest nephew Benjamin set out for Greenwood to survey and select land for settlement. In the spring of 1839, the two families relocated and Margaret Whitworth quickly established her plantation, Forest Park.¹⁷ One daughter, Isabella Whitworth became mistress at Forest Park while her brother Samuel moved just over the Red River into east Texas. Samuel did not expect to reside there long. He had moved across the Red to extract profit from the rich soils and move onward, as generations of slaveholders before him had done across the American South. Writing to Isabella in 1855, Whitworth exemplified the transient component of westward migration. He wrote Isabella that he did not have “much interest in fixing things nice as I don’t expect to live here long” before he boasted “we are getting along verry well with our crop our corn is coming up verry nice and now prepairing our cotton land.”¹⁸ Like others who settled this region, Samuel encountered both the promise of the soil and the dangers inherent with living alongside this powerful river. Three years later, Whitworth proffered a very different update. Flooding and bad weather had damaged the crops, affected valuable chattel, and hindered transportation. For two months he moaned, “we have had a wretched wet muddy time, water courses up, roads almost impassable” and the situation worsened because “only a few days ago we lost a valuable negro man of typhoid pneumonia.”¹⁹ With either too much Red River water flowing into the Atchafalaya—making riverboat travel difficult—or too much Mississippi flowing down the Atchafalaya basin—raising “the possibility that the Big Muddy might take the channel as its own”—molding the Red River to suit the needs of the expansive slaveholders would prove to be a long process.²⁰

The settlement of the Red River region, however, was part of a longer history of southern agricultural expansion as the “frontier” of the cotton country and slavery moved steadily westward over the course of the early nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the War of 1812, slaveholders were at the forefront of the quick-paced surge southwestward, transforming the alluvial soils into what Adam Rothman coined “a slave country.”²¹ Earlier generations of slave societies, to use the grouping terminology of Ira Berlin, were members of the charter, plantation, and revolutionary generations. The life cycle, daily pressures, and adaptability of their enslavement were vastly different from that experienced by later generations of slaves. Beginning just before the turn of the nineteenth century, enslavement entered the migration generation: this new regime severely hemmed in slaves’ personal autonomy and changed the relationship between master and slave. This change in the circumstances of slavery was

¹⁷ Gene Hodgson, “Forest Park: History of a Plantation Home and the Family that Built It,” *NLHAJ* 18 (Winter 1987): 31–3.

¹⁸ Samuel Whitworth to Isabella Whitworth, March 9, 1855, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS Archives and Special Collections, Noel Memorial Library (hereafter LSUS).

¹⁹ Samuel Whitworth to Isabella Whitworth, January 15, 1858, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

²⁰ Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 101–102.

²¹ Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: HUP, 2007), x.

triggered by the development of commodity markets, transformation of staple-crop preference and production, and opening of new, rich expanses of land in the western territories. The hurtle westward by slaveholders large and small marked the historic completion of the seismic shift from “societies with slaves” to “slave societies.”²²

The physical journey to the Red River region was long and arduous, but the improvements to transportation in the nineteenth century meant greater ease and efficiency over earlier travel. However, it remained an arduous trek for both the white and enslaved members of a migrating family. In an 1836 letter, Henry Marshall, who arrived in the Red River region at the height of the western land boom, informed his wife that while his railroad money had arrived, “[I] shall move my negroes to town to be ready for the first boat. The river is very low and I may be detained.” Three weeks later he had cleared another obstacle—the raft—and wrote “we arrived . . . through the raft, literally as in one place they were obliged to remove the logs in order to get the boat through.”²³ A combination of changes ameliorated the state of transportation. First, turnpike mania gripped the nation, leading to the rapid building of good-quality toll roads, which allowed travel to happen faster, with fewer mishaps, and for areas to be better connected. These toll roads laid the foundation for a bi-phased transport improvement. The first facilitated the “transport of value—people, mail and small scale goods” followed by the “transport of volume—bulk freight.”²⁴ Prior to the early 1820s, the Red River region contained “two trails—no roads—through this section,” and settlers arriving from the East would often travel through Tennessee in order to descend the Cumberland and then Mississippi rivers by keelboat until reaching the mouth of the Red River.²⁵ Settlers then had to work their way upstream and through the Raft.

The presence of two trails, instead of full-fledged roads, suggests that wagon travel was difficult and underscores the reliance on the river for transportation in and out of the region. In his 1835 diary, New Hampshire native James Burns Wallace noted the desolate nature of road travel. He remarked that forty miles passed without seeing another person, which lent a remote nature to northwest Louisiana.²⁶ Even as late as 1854, Frederick Law Olmsted described Natchitoches, Shreveport, and Fulton as the three main arrival points along the river. He said that the latter two locations were the most popular, especially with travelers. Shreveport garnered wagons and traffic from Alabama and Mississippi; Fulton, Arkansas attracted travelers from Arkansas and Tennessee while Alexandria, the largest town at the base of this geography,

²² Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: HUP, 1998), 8. See also Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge: HUP, 2004) for greater analysis of the nineteenth century antebellum South, which *Many Thousands Gone* did not investigate. See also Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (NY: HW, 1993); Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World.”

²³ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 7, 1836; November 28, 1836, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

²⁴ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 114. See also Watson, *Liberty and Power*; Paskoff, *Troubled Waters*.

²⁵ Glenn Martel, “Early Days in Northwest Louisiana,” *The AHQ* 12 (1953): 120–1.

²⁶ James Burns Wallace Diary, Mss. 3476, LLMVC.

transferred passengers and freight.²⁷ Fulton, located between present-day Texarkana and Hope, Arkansas, was popular because of a prominent road called the southwest trail or “military road” that connected Saint Louis to the Red River. George Featherstonhaugh, who travelled through the Red River district in November and December 1834, stayed on the military road, despite writing it was filled with rocks, stumps, mud, and felled trees and was often missing bridges. This military road also was wider than many trails—thus accommodating settlers’ wagons—and was better maintained than trails. Despite the difficulty in navigating the potholes, thousands of families migrated using the road, especially during the early settlement period.²⁸ Most relocation involved overland travel in wagons for the slaveholding family and by foot for the enslaved. For all parties, migration presented a struggle with the surroundings.

When her family moved near Colfax in the mid-1850s, Dosia William Moore’s father was the first to travel to the Red River with the majority of slaves while she, her sister, her mother, and her “negro nurse” took a steamboat from South Carolina to New Orleans, followed by an overland journey from Alexandria.²⁹ Although wealthy families might have arrived by steamboat, the costs of relocation and land redevelopment prevented the majority of small slaveholding families from using this method. Until 1824, the Red was navigated almost entirely by keelboats, flat-bottomed boats that were supplemented by larger and more powerful steamboats. Steamboats entered the Red from 1815, when Shreve made his first trip to the region, but sporadic in number until 1824–25. Steamboat travel became less expensive and more frequent after the clearing of the raft; thirty-five boats made regular journeys up the Red River between 1835 and 1840.³⁰ It was certainly a cost-effective way to get cotton to market, but it remained relatively expensive for relocation. James Laroe, for instance, began the trip to Red River region from New Jersey in 1846 to scout out his plantation. His steerage steamboat passage to New Orleans cost \$7 and took around three weeks. The nine-day journey from New Orleans to Shreveport cost \$5. The impediment of the raft and the fluctuating conditions of the river no doubt added to the immense cost of traveling “up the Red River about 700 miles.”³¹ The high price of one steerage ticket from New Orleans to Shreveport made this mode of transportation prohibitive for an entire family and their slaves and seemed to have been reserved for wealthier settlers. Like Moore, Ellison Adger’s family employed both water and land travel to reach Bossier Parish from South Carolina. Adger, whose family owned Chicora and Caroline Bluff plantations in Bossier Parish, recounts the taxing journey as imparted by old “Ma Jane,” a

²⁷ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey Through Texas; or, A Saddle-Trip on the Southwestern Frontier* (NY: Mason Brothers, 1860), 43.

²⁸ Walter Moffatt, “Transportation in Arkansas, 1819–1840,” *AHQ* 15 (1956): 188–9. Donald P. McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society, 1819–1861* (Fayetteville: UAP, 2000), 20.

²⁹ Carol Wells, ed., *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River: The Memoirs of Dosia Williams Moore* (Ruston: McGinty Publication, 1990), 9.

³⁰ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi*, 235

³¹ James S. Laroe Diary, Mss. 253, LLMVC. The \$7 rate is equivalent to \$206 as of 2012 and \$5 is equivalent to \$147. For inflation rate calculations see <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/spp/polisci/faculty-staff/robert-sahr/inflation-conversion-factors-years-1774-estimated-2024-dollars-recent-years/individual-year-conversion-factor-table-1>

family slave who made the 1846 journey with an earlier generation of Adgers. Ma Jane, who was just a year older than Mrs. Adger's grandfather and who had worked for five generations of Adgers, remembered "the horses, mules and cattle, as well as the negroes all came over land, a trip that took weeks if not months." As the elderly slave recalled, it was a long stretch of time until "they at last reached the Mississippi River on Christmas Day."³² Specifically, the Red was log jammed and impassable until 1838 and even then regular access was limited and sporadic. Ma Jane clearly remembered that "after leaving Natchez or Vicksburg they started across the great swamp between there and Monroe," evidently crossing northern Louisiana by foot before finally reaching Bossier.³³ The raft was dynamic and mercurial. Out of the raft, which was "so close and compact as to be walked over without wetting the feet" grew "broom-straw, willow, and other small bushes" that lent the river the appearance of "an old worn-out field."³⁴ In many places this barrier has assumed a permanent form and forced the river to divert itself and create various bayous, channels, and lakes.³⁵ The river often rose to levels non-conducive to river traffic, and local newspapers reported the details of river conditions, often noting its erratic nature. The local press noted that the elevated river meant that from "the higher portion of Red River . . . navigation can never be depended on with any degree of certainty."³⁶ Agricultural publication *De Bow's Review* wrote of the raft: "such a mass of decaying wood is malarious in the extreme," proving a health hazard as well as an impediment to settlement.

Ensuring that the Red was navigable for settlers and for the easy transportation of cotton to New Orleans was of paramount importance to the livelihood of the slaveholders and to the regional economy. Henry Shreve updated his superiors in July 1835 regarding six months of work clearing the raft. The rapids of the Red alone presented a major physical obstacle. Crossing the turbulent waters required up to five days of men hauling boats, tools, and supplies over the rocks. After progressing to Coushatta Chute, where the foot of the raft had been two years previously, Shreve found "trees growing under the baks of the river . . . standing on an incline position projecting their tops near the middle of the river." This new growth pattern presented a "formidable obstruction to the navigation of the river and at the same time forming a very great impediment to timber that floats down river" making the renewal of the raft likely.³⁷ Escalating costs, moreover, presented a further challenge. In 1836 Shreve penned a long letter to superiors justifying the mounting costs, explaining that "the last thirty miles of the raft that have been removed have required as much labor as the first one hundred and twenty miles."³⁸ Shreve's work proved indispensable. Improving the accessibility of the Red River

³² Memoirs of Ellison Moultrie Adger, Mrs. Mary Moultrie Adger Family and Plantation Records, Collection 093, LSUS.

³³ Memoirs of Ellison Moultrie Adger, Mrs. Mary Moultrie Adger Family and Plantation Records, Collection 093, LSUS.

³⁴ *De Bow's Review* 17 (October 1855), 437, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/acg1336.1-19.004>. See also Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*.

³⁵ Hubert Humphreys, "Photographic Views of Red River Raft, 1873," *LH* 12 (1971): 102.

³⁶ "Navigation of Red River," *Caddo Free Press*, March 28, 1839.

³⁷ Henry Shreve to "Dear Sir," July 1, 1835, J. Fair Hardin Collection, Mss. 1014, LLMVC.

³⁸ Henry Shreve to "Dear Sir," July 6, 1836, J. Fair Hardin Collection, Mss. 1014, LLMVC.

solidified the region's position in the cotton empire and bolstered settlement. Regular steamboat traffic began in 1838 and made river bottomland still more attractive while "accelerating the cultivation of cotton" along the river and its tributaries.³⁹ Steamboat traffic became central to the acquisition of news, letters and market information, food and supplies, as well as slaves and the sale of cotton. Many steamboats, such as the *Belle of Red River*, *Live Oak*, and *Yazoo* maintained regular schedules following Shreve's clearing. During the 1840s the *Yazoo* left New Orleans every ten days for Shreveport, while the *Belle of Red River* departed New Orleans "every other Wednesday" and Shreveport "every other Tuesday" during the season.⁴⁰ Newspaper advertisements for steamboats promised "the traveling public and mercantile community" a "safe, expeditious and above all regular communication with New Orleans," and the publication of departure times from all ports.⁴¹ Removal of the raft was crucial to the Red River cotton boon and the regular availability of steamboats ensured the transport of staple crops and enslaved labor, all of which enhanced the desirability of the region to profit-driven slaveholders.⁴²

The expansion of the Red River plantation district was emblematic of a deeper economic transition. This transition rested squarely on the expansion of American cotton and the growing demand for cloth and commodities. As Anthony Kaye observes, once slavery and the burgeoning demands of international capitalism converged, the Red River was bound to the cotton mills of Manchester, England. Slavery entered a "second slavery," a transformative evolution that culminated in modern slavery.⁴³ The expansion of slavery, and its modern nature began to emerge in the early 1800s. The United States and Britain, though two distinct and politically divided countries, were a "culturally and economically united intercontinental system" that privileged settlement for the purpose of commercial and financial gain.⁴⁴ In fact, much of the social thought of the time was comprised of two kinds of change: development, or the "qualitative alteration in economic production" and growth, "the quantitative increases in production."⁴⁵ Taken together, the convergence of production capacity and market demand created the first of the South's economic booms. As metropolitan demand for staple crops such as cotton surged, an explosion of settlement resulted from the surge in demand for staple exports. The commercial value of export-driven cash crops meant that the slave population worked in a hostile environment on relatively isolated plantations across the growing cotton belt. To keep up with mounting demand for commodities such as cotton, sugar, tobacco, and

³⁹ Gudmestad, *Steamboats*, 143. See also Paskoff, *Troubled Waters*.

⁴⁰ "The Splendid Steamer" and "Belle of Red River," *Caddo Gazette*, February 11, 1846. These ads ran in the *Caddo Gazette* through 1855.

⁴¹ "Steamboat Rodolph," *Caddo Gazette*, February 11, 1846. See also *Shreveport Journal*, *Caddo Gazette* and *DeSoto Intelligence*, and *Southwestern Shreveport*.

⁴² Gudmestad, *Steamboats*, 150.

⁴³ Kaye, "The Second Slavery," 628. See also Kolchin, *American Slavery*; Wright, *Slavery and Economic Development*, 14–48; Seth Rockman, "Liberty is Land and Slaves," *OAH Magazine of History* 19 (2005): 8–11; Peter Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians* (NY: Harper, 1989); Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.

⁴⁴ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 9, 96–97.

⁴⁵ Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 24–25.

rice “the planters needed slaves,” which the emerging internal slave trade supplied.⁴⁶ The movement of those enslaved to new cotton lands increased cotton production from “1.2 million pounds in 1790 to 2.1 *billion* in 1859.” The British textile industry was dominated by American cotton by the 1830s. The Bank of the United States (B.U.S.) was the single biggest lender in the nation and by the 1830s the Natchez and New Orleans branches “lent out a full third of the capital of the B.U.S., much of it used to buy thousands of enslaved people.”⁴⁷ Slaveholders thus began amassing wealth in the form of slaves—actively investing in more humans than ever before—an accumulation pattern that had “no counterpart in non-slave societies” and one that vanished when slavery ended.⁴⁸ Slavery rapidly became a reasonably secure method of holding individual wealth, largely because the federal system of taxation “protected both wealth and rights in slave property” and financial institutions were founded and funded on enslaved bodies and the cotton extracted from them.⁴⁹ Slavery was a core element of American foreign trade and its commercial influence on banking, insurance, and shipping ensured that slavery was peculiar to the South, but a national institution.

Mobility—a key element of this modern, second slavery—was central to the “economic dynamism and capitalistic character” of westward expansion and a marked feature of the slaveholders who pushed into new territories.⁵⁰ As Rothman notes, the forcible expansion of slavery into the new territories put slaves to work in new plantation areas cultivating sugar and cotton, two crops that had not been important to colonial North America. The closure of the transatlantic slave trade promoted the emergence of a robust internal slave trade, which forced slave relocation to satisfy planter demand and “molded the slave system of the United States.”⁵¹ From an economic standpoint, “the antebellum South was not a ‘cheap labor’ economy” but rather “a society whose economy and polity revolved around the scarcity and high price of slave labor.” The migration generation of slaves resolved the Southern labor problem and provided the resources upon which the economic boom of the lower cotton south depended. Rothman’s “slave country” encapsulates Berlin’s notion of slave societies, where “slavery stood at the center of economic production” and provided “the model for social relations” throughout the cotton South.⁵²

The objectives of slaveholders who scrambled to the raw and unrefined cotton belt were removed from those embraced by the grand planters of the Lower Mississippi Valley. These slaveholders, many of them first-generation planters or slaveholders of small means, were driven by the promise of profit. They eschewed established plantation society and the idealized

⁴⁶ Kaye, “The Second Slavery,” 631.

⁴⁷ Edward Baptist, “Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, and Securitized Human Beings: The Panic of 1837 and the Fate of Slavery,” *Common-Place* 10 (2010): 4–6. For in-depth investigation of the global influence and significance of cotton see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.

⁴⁸ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 61.

⁴⁹ Kaye, “The Second Slavery,” 631–2; Baptist, “Toxic Debt,” 6.

⁵⁰ Kaye, “The Second Slavery,” 633.

⁵¹ Rothman, *Slave Country*, x. See also Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 96–97; Watson, *Liberty and Power*.

⁵² Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 71; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 8.

manifestations of wealth such as large, decadent homes, and slavery glossed with a veneer of gentility. Instead, they invested their resources—financial, familial, and human chattel—in the more direct and immediate promise of a profitable return from the fertile soil. Their identity and motivation derived from the possibility inherent in the transformation of the cotton frontier. These slaveholders were distinguished by their mobility across the “slave country.” Many Red River settlers crisscrossed the South seeking out the next boom or rich land. They moved whenever fortunes seemed bright in a new area or, having left another family member in charge of an established plantation, migrated further westward to expand the familial wealth. Following this classic chain migration pattern, the Flournoy family sent the eldest son Alfred westward from Pulaski, Tennessee, to settle the fertile ground just north of Shreveport. In 1836 he was an early settler in that section, expanding the familial cotton empire westward, while the Pulaski holding remained in his brother’s care. After 1838, with an overseer in place in Tennessee, Alfred’s brothers fanned out along the Red River, following the contours of a typical migration to this region.⁵³ Classic pull theory informed emigration to the region and certain “known economic opportunities” pulled new residents there. One key ‘pull’ was that the benefit reaped from the new land would be better than from old land. Slaveholders moving within the expanding cotton South, especially to a region at its farthest reaches, “understood not just that they were taking risks,” James Belich observes, “but also that risks led to rewards.”⁵⁴ Emigration was frequently discussed using the language of agrarian republicanism.

Much like planters who settled other frontier locations, Red River emigrants were looking for land that would restore and extend their wealth. In many cases, family was at the heart of the move. As Edward Baptist has highlighted in respect to a similarly timed migration to Florida and as Diane Mutte Burke has shown in Missouri, the decision to migrate and the actual migration process was heavily reliant on kinship networks. The money to finance a move might be borrowed from wealthier family members and often planters relied on kin already present in the region to purchase or select land, clear fields or use political clout to secure choice tracts.⁵⁵ Often, families had moved into the more interior regions of the southeastern states. They would frequently establish a plantation and settle for a few years before the entire family or a single-family member—usually a son—continued westward. Correspondence typically relayed in glowing terms the newly inhabited regions while disparaging Eastern homes, a tactic that helped promote relocation. As male progeny settled across the cotton belt,

⁵³ *History of the Flournoy Family* compiled by Meredith Flournoy Ingersoll, Summer 1935 and Relating to the Advent of the Flournoy Family to Caddo Parish, Louisiana, December 12, 1932, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC.

⁵⁴ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 130; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (NY: Norton, 1987), 42; James Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South* (Charlottesville: UVAP, 2002), 40, 69

⁵⁵ Edward Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2002); Diane Mutte Burke, *On Slavery’s Border: Missouri’s Small Slaveholding Households, 1815–1865* (Athens, UGA, 2010). For an additional investigation on kinship networks and migration see Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Families and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: UGA, 2004). Billingsley also shows that older men spearheaded migrations and this scenario is supported by the migration patterns excavated in this work.

the congested nature of most small to mid-sized slaveholding households dissolved. Moreover, as relocation to remote areas became commonplace, significant changes occurred in relations between households as individual families became more isolated than previously at the ancestral home.⁵⁶ Families splintered, as some members remained on established plantations or farms in cotton rich areas, such as western Georgia, the Alabama Black Belt, and Mississippi, while others continued the arc of settlement across the southern states.⁵⁷ The Fullilove, Marshall, Powell, Flournoy, and Hutchinson families, as will be shown in greater depth, fit this migration profile, as did countless other families that populated the rich soil of the Red River.

Most of the families that became well established in this area arrived as part of a chain migration after the initial relocation of one family member. This practice dated back to the early settlement of the region and ensured that land could be purchased, temporary housing built, and slaves relocated to break the ground for planting prior to the larger migration. The Fullilove family's relocation narrative is representative of chain migration to the Red River. James, the eldest brother, was born in Georgia around 1809 and during childhood the family relocated to Oglethorpe, central Georgia. James married Tabitha in 1831 and moved to Columbia, central Kentucky. At this stage he owned just two slaves, and in all probability toiled alongside them as a small—albeit slaveholding—farmer. By 1840, he and Tabitha had established themselves in Noxubee, Mississippi. James began the transition from small slaveholding farmer to planter in 1850 with the relocation to their Blossom Hill farm, just a few miles south of Shreveport. Ten years later, James, Tabitha and four children were an established slaveholding family and owned twenty-six slaves. Enticed by James's success, his brothers William and John followed a similar migration arc to Caddo Parish. John, the middle child, was born in 1811 in Georgia, and he married Almeda and had two children on Georgia soil prior to 1847. The family of four relocated to Blossom Hill in 1850 with fourteen slaves. Youngest brother William completed the family chain migration. Born in 1822, he moved to Caddo Parish before his 1848 marriage to Elizabeth. In 1850, William was twenty-eight and owned thirteen slaves on a farmstead near his siblings. By 1860, he had moved to Shreveport and enlisted in 1861 as a private in the Crescent regiment of the Confederacy's Louisiana infantry.⁵⁸ Jas. G. Fullilove also induced his brother-in-law, Robert Holmes, to follow suit and lay down roots in Caddo Parish, further expanding the familial migration pattern.

The Fulliloves were members of a land-hungry culture that had been populating western lands since the Louisiana Purchase. Following the War of 1812 but culminating in the Jacksonian era, a land-grabbing ethos dovetailed with the expansion of the frontier west. This

⁵⁶ Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Baltimore: JHUP, 1991), 29, 79. Billingsley disagrees with Cashin regarding the splintering of families and the isolated nature of females in the new southwest. In the case of the families in her work, those individuals maintained kinship networks and "their lives virtually always played out within the context of a kinship group (74)."

⁵⁷ Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 45.

⁵⁸ "In Memoriam, Mrs. T. H. Fullilove," Family History, Fullilove Family Ancestry, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS. Census information, www.ancestry.com.

created a “contest for property and profit” that led to the “contest for cultural dominance” and the forced relocation of Native Americans from the western frontier.⁵⁹ The participation in this land-grabbing culture and the decision to seek wealth by westward expansion was endemic to antebellum slaveholders. Slaveholders or aspiring yeomen dispersed across the South focused on land and slaves. This tornado-like movement was integral to the strengthening of the slave states and the commodity-based southern economy. As this movement westward gained additional converts and accelerated, it became not only a “literal territorial form of economic growth” but “the most concrete, down-to-earth demonstration of the economic habit on which the entire nation became dependent.”⁶⁰

Throughout the antebellum period, migration was intertwined with the rise and fall of cotton prices. Booming cotton prices from 1815 to 1819 heralded the opening of the frontier. The 1815 price of cotton was 21¢, double that of the prior year, and rose to 29¢ in 1816. The price of cotton halved in 1820 to 17¢ from the 1819 rate and continued to fall until 1824, with cotton worth 14¢. The highs and lows of cotton prices created three pulses of westward settlement tied to the high cotton prices and heavy trading of this staple crop. Cotton underpinned credit and the antebellum economy is mapped alongside the rise and fall of the commodity prices for cotton. Planters acquired more or less land and slaves at affordable rates while migration westward moved in fits and starts as money became available. Most investors managed these oscillations but the boom and bust cycle of the 1830s had long-term implications for Red River settlers as well as for landowners throughout the expanding South. Andrew Jackson’s distribution of federal deposits to local, oftentimes pet banks, in 1833 unleashed a speculative binge with the sale of public lands soaring to 20 million acres in 1836. The specie circular halted the western land boom, and after the Panic of 1837, cotton prices more or less bottomed out before strengthening in the late 1840s and early 1850s.⁶¹ The accessibility of credit in the 1850s led to another wave of migration as the high cotton prices led to restoration of property values and access to relatively affordable credit. The confluence of expanses of available land and the cotton revolution solidified the South’s position of importance in the booming world economy and induced more entrance into the “civilizing” economy of commercial agriculture.”⁶²

As Christopher Morris indicates, southern economic growth was forever in a state of metamorphosis. Warren County, Mississippi—the region of Morris’s study—featured an initial settlement that predated, and thus is not attributed to, the boom ushered in by the cotton gin. By 1819 Vicksburg was laid out in cotton fields. In this initial stage, which was markedly different from the initial Red River settlement, “slaves were more useful as extra hands” as opposed to

⁵⁹ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 27.

⁶⁰ Miller, *South By Southwest*, 5, 8; Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 28.

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970, Bicentennial Edition* (Washington, DC, 1975), 209.

⁶² Rothman, *Slave Country*, 46.

“investments aimed at increasing farm income.” Once cotton cultivation took root in the 1830s, slaveholders stopped hiring slaves out and reinvested in slave labor for their plantations. Warren County planters began to require slave labor because “providing a comfortable life for one’s family required owning slaves” and slaves contributed to the material prosperity of the white inhabitants.⁶³ Like their Mississippi neighbors, slaves and cotton were also interlinked and synonymous with financial success for Red River slaveholders. Slaves were essential labor investments who would clear the rich land and plant bountiful crops. Similar to Warren County and Natchez area migrations, settlement to Red River region was a two-stage affair. However, by the time settlement to Red River region peaked, the acquisition of new slaves or relocation of one’s slaves was essential to success. Nevertheless, the ubiquity of large-scale cotton production in tandem with rapid migration caused some concern to non-slaveholders and yeomen, who feared that mobility might prove an “unceasing and disruptive” feature of southern society. That many migrating slaveholders had access to greater resources encapsulated the contradictions and complexities of southern society for non-slaveholders and yeomen. Above all, the natural superiority of southwest land supported the “strong movement” of people extending the cotton south, and, in particular, the “alluvial river bottoms along the Mississippi . . . and the Red River.”⁶⁴ During the “flush times” of the 1830s there was a palpable feeling that “anyone might dip into a virtually limitless pool of money,” which bred both a “culture of speculation unique in its abandon” and a feeling of invulnerability among slaveholders should “anything or anyone endanger the delicate equilibrium of their surroundings.”⁶⁵ Settlers like the Fulliloves and Whitworths methodically made their way across the South and remained steadfastly determined landowners as they pushed the cotton frontier further west.

Enterprising men, especially younger males from non-elite backgrounds, saw the period from the 1803 Louisiana Purchase to the Mexican War in 1846 as an opportunity to gain greater social and economic standing. Indeed, as James Oakes has indicated, the vast majority of masters most commonly entered the slaveholding class through yeomanry. Additionally, small slaveholders, who census returns reveal comprised the majority of Red River inhabitants, were particularly mobile in their quest for more land, more slaves, and more status.⁶⁶ For these small slaveholders or those newly arrived to the slaveholding class, the vast swathes of available land along the Red magnified the appeal of the land grab, particularly at the height of the Jacksonian land sales. In turn, those settlers eyed the expansive Texan and southwestern borderlands. For these expansionist cotton growers, the Mexican-American War offered a vision of land and empire and those at the vanguard of Texan settlement were positioned to claim the best lands.

⁶³ Christopher Morris, *Becoming Southern: The Evolution of a Way of Life, Warren County and Vicksburg, Mississippi, 1770–1860* (NY: OUP, 1995), xiv, xv, xvii, 26, 66–7.

⁶⁴ Miller, *South by Southwest*, 92, 97; Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (NY: Norton, 1978), 16–17, 22.

⁶⁵ Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 2, 6, 13.

⁶⁶ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (London: Norton, 1998), 52.

Most Texas settlers, as Randolph Campbell notes, came from east of the Red River. Most of them were ardently pro-slavery men and their attempt to extend racial bondage into Texas was met overall with strong opposition from Mexican authorities.⁶⁷ With Texan independence, cotton interests and slavery were at the helm and triggered events that culminated in war. The overwhelmingly militant southern support for the war indicates its “‘southern’ rather than ‘national’” character.⁶⁸ Many of the slaveholders who volunteered to fight did so in order to lay claim to land. Nearly sixty-five percent of 73,532 men who volunteered for the war hailed from the fourteen slave states.⁶⁹ James De Bow, editor of the agricultural journal bearing his name, reported that Louisiana contributed seven times as many men as Massachusetts.⁷⁰ Participation was not just a forum for Southerners to display their aggrieved sense of national and sectional honor. Significantly, it enabled slaveholders to “advance their economic and political interests,” while pushing Red River cotton cultivation further westward. The extension of slavery—as well as the prestige of mastery—ensured that small and large-scale planters fought to extend slavery into the American Southwest.⁷¹ An 1839 article in the *Caddo Free Press* cited the vehemence with which local residents along the Red River supported westward expansion. It was, they concluded, the high tide of Anglo-Saxon settlement. The local paper observed: “The tide of Anglo Saxon population is setting steadily and with no ebb to the west. Wave will follow wave until the towers and palaces of Mexico shall be submerged, the Rocky Mountains swallowed up and the stream of life flow uninterruptedly from the Atlantic to the Pacific.”⁷² Settlers to the Red River embodied this antebellum culture of expansion, one that privileged white mastery.

Colonel Henry Marshall exemplified this type of drive. His letters to his wife Maria tell a familiar story of westward migration. Hailing from Columbia, South Carolina, Marshall discovered that his overworked land in the Carolina midlands could not provide the profits for which he yearned. Accordingly, he set out on numerous trips across the breadth of the South to locate and purchase new, fertile land. He wrote Maria that if he were out of debt and “had a reasonable income” nothing could tempt him away from hearth and home. It was his desire to find profitable land that led him to an “absence of two months a year.” Once good land was found, however, it would “enable me to devote the other ten entirely to my wife.”⁷³ Like other men with ambition, Marshall followed his kinsmen, scoping out property near his brother in Mississippi and his brother-in-law in Alabama. A November 1, 1833 letter to Maria detailed the risk and beauty of land in Yazoo County, Mississippi. The enormity of the settlement decision preyed on Marshall’s mind. Writing home to Maria, Marshall weighed the relative merits of

⁶⁷ Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821–1865* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1989), 2, 36.

⁶⁸ Gregory Hospodor, “‘Bound by all the ties of honor’: Southern Honor, the Mississippians, and the Mexican War,” *The Journal of Mississippi History* 62 (1999): 3.

⁶⁹ Hospodor, “Bound by all the ties of honor” 3, 8, 9, 10.

⁷⁰ John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South, 1800–1861* (repr., Urbana: UILP, 2002), 9.

⁷¹ Franklin, *The Militant South*, 7.

⁷² “Eastern Texas—Soda Lake, Port Caddo, Tuscumbia,” *Caddo Free Press*, March 28, 1839.

⁷³ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, October 18, 1833, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

each area: “the risk in cotton is bad for a purchaser, but I feel confident of being able to do better than I did in Carolina . . . the crops are indeed beautiful—so much so that if I owned them I should be tempted to spend a great part of my time upon it . . . so much rich land must make society.”⁷⁴ He was not, however, willing to settle in Mississippi, and informed his wife that he sought to investigate prospects along the Red River “before I make up my mind where to settle.”⁷⁵ Finally acquiring his plantation in DeSoto parish, fittingly named Land’s End, Marshall established a Red River cotton farm with slaves valued at \$6,100 in 1857, under a deed of trust in Alabama. Most likely, these seven slaves worked on his brother-in-law’s property. At his death in 1864, Marshall’s Louisiana slave property was valued at \$170,121. The one tract of land whose title had not been moved to Texas for safekeeping was valued at \$37,000 and he owned \$54,504.45 in moveable property and \$37,200 in immovable property.⁷⁶

Like Marshall, William Hutchinson moved westward in stages. His 1829 land grant, signed by Andrew Jackson for a large tract in Montgomery County, Alabama, was the first step in his family migration. Hutchinson, whose grandsons would become prominent Red River slaveholders, had moved to Alabama in 1825. At his death, this tract passed to his two sons, Haley and John. Following the sale of the land by Lowndes County to John, the brothers continued acquiring land and slaves in Alabama.⁷⁷ The 1830 census indicates that John and his wife Matilda resided in Lowndes County, Alabama, with two male children under five and they owned four slaves. The historical record is silent on Haley Hutchinson’s activities after 1834, but John advanced westward to Bossier Parish, Louisiana with his family in 1843, settling a tract near Rocky Mount. During the remaining three years of his life, John Hutchinson amassed quite an estate and continued plantation expansion. He died September 1, 1846 and left a Bossier Parish estate of over 1,349 acres with improvements valued at \$7,018, fifty-seven slaves valued from \$125 to \$600 each, and a total estate valued at over fifty thousand dollars.⁷⁸

Family migrations also often provided a network of relations that stabilized the uncertainties of nineteenth century life and provided comfort on the frontier. Joseph Graham, his wife Isophena, seven children, and twenty slaves moved to Louisiana with the Hutchinson family in 1843. After John Hutchinson’s death, Graham was appointed administrator to minors William and Robert Hutchinson. Graham, along with William and Robert, continued expanding their plantations. They purchased eleven slaves from Mobile, Alabama for the cost of \$5,200 and five more slaves from New Orleans for \$3,460 in 1849 for the Hutchinson holdings.⁷⁹ Ever

⁷⁴ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 1, 1863, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

⁷⁵ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 1, 1863, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

⁷⁶ Henry Marshall Property Inventory, July 22, 1864, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335, LSUS.

⁷⁷ William Hutchinson Land Grant 1829, William Joseph Hutchinson Family and Plantation Records, Collection 075, LSUS.

⁷⁸ Margaret Hutchinson McClellan, *William Joseph Hutchinson and Family of Caspiana Plantation* (Bossier City: Tipton Printing & Publishing Co, 1975), 13, 21, 24, 183.

⁷⁹ Hutchinson McClellan, *William Joseph Hutchinson and Family of Caspiana Plantation*, 13, 21, 24, 183. On the importance of the role of guardian see Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship*, 43.

attentive to their prospects, settlers like the Hutchinsons and Grahams recognized that their immediate and long-term financial success rested squarely with the cotton economy.

Slaves provided a constant labor source to break new land, drain, clear and plant fields, and build levees. They also maintained a dual role in the economic vitality of the South as a form of liquid currency that was essential for the growth and expansion of the cotton complex. The economy of the antebellum South had, as its cornerstone, the “idea that the bodies of enslaved people had a measurable monetary value,” whether that monetary worth was exercised in sale or not.⁸⁰ The idea that slaves were moveable assets allowed slaveholders to leverage assets held in chattel to fund further settlement and land purchase. As Bonnie Martin has shown, the use of human collateral in mortgage arrangements allowed resources central to the expansion of local and regional economies to circulate easily. This movement of slaves, goods, cash, or credit was essential on agricultural frontiers such as northwest Louisiana as it provided a repository of credit and moveable collateralized assets, alongside the rural banking systems.⁸¹ In April of 1824, Alfred Flournoy sold three slaves—Celia, Judy, and Pamela—in exchange for sixty mules. His letter to his wife states that this was a favorable bargain, and, perhaps, even a profitable disposal of his slave property since “I have sold the girls for two hundred dollars more than I could have had for them in cash, the mules I purchased at cash price.” Eager to proceed with setting up his Red River plantation, Flournoy quickly sold the slaves to purchase goods necessary for settlement.⁸² Converting human capital into animal power, Flournoy revealed just how interchangeable commodities were on the Red River and how slave pricing sometimes appeared in transfer markets. During the flush times of the 1830s, loans backed by slaves were deemed “virtually risk free to lenders.”⁸³ Regardless of the number of slaves a slaveholder owned, they needed the “ability to move their slave property however they saw fit to maximize profits.” For Flournoy, that calculation converted women into mules, but for others, mortgaging slave property was essential for land purchase.

On the rural frontier, slave mortgages—or the income accrued from slave rentals — were essential to the process of migration. Many families that chose to move to the Red River valley did not have liquid funds or the means to finance their journey and had to take out loans or lines of credit to move their possessions. Others had to use credit to purchase additional slaves or to move their slaves with them. Slaves were consequently often hired out near the plantation of origin in order to pay for relocation costs. Henry Marshall, for instance, hired nine of his slaves out in Atlanta in 1835 to finance his Louisiana relocation in 1836.⁸⁴ He also hired out his slaves in 1833 to finance his land-scouting trips.⁸⁵ What Marshall recognized was that

⁸⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: HUP, 1999), 25.

⁸¹ Bonnie Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine: Mortgaging Human Property,” *JSH* 76 (2010): 818.

⁸² Alfred Flournoy to Martha Flournoy, April 23, 1824, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC.

⁸³ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 70.

⁸⁴ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, March 3, 1835, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

⁸⁵ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 8, 1833, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

slave property helped to “maintain credit relationships across long distances.” Indeed, private mortgage contracts using slaves allowed slaveholders to borrow from one another and endorse debt contracts of friends or family members. Thus, those buying slaves could purchase them faster since it was unnecessary to have the entire purchase price before making the acquisition. Slaves might also be liquidated in times of personal and national economic distress. Additionally, slaves were used as collateral to raise significant sums of cash and credit through informal networks that “operated alongside, but not directly through” the emerging banking system. Slave property was thus the “critical link” in antebellum credit relations and much of the banking in Louisiana was “conducted directly with factorage firms rather than banks.” These firms were integral in the purchase and sale of slaves, as well as cotton, and they serviced the needs of farmers who availed themselves of every source of capital and credit. Small merchants in rural and small towns likewise served as the small farmer’s factor and forwarded essential credit and cash advances for the day-to-day operations of an estate. These merchants frequently deducted an interest fee of between 10 to 25 percent from the final crop sales of the small farmer. Although local furnishing merchants came to dominate postbellum credit relations, cotton and slavery firmly underpinned the cash and credit antebellum economy, especially in the relatively isolated portions of the cotton kingdom such as northwest Louisiana.⁸⁶

Historian Richard Kilbourne posits that slave wealth was “integral to a complex financial system” throughout the South that supported “a debt load . . . in the hundreds of millions of dollars.”⁸⁷ Slaves were used as collateral in credit transactions, as loan security, valued when estates were divided, often sold off to pay outstanding debt, and given as wedding gifts. The Consolidated Association of the Planters of Louisiana (CAPL), a state bank, created leverage for slaveholders at less cost and on longer terms by securitizing slaves. These bonds “effectively converted enslavers’ biggest investment—human beings” into multiple income streams, all under the control of borrowers, each of them stockholders. The mortgaging of slaves was “essential lubricating credit” in the expanding South.⁸⁸ That slaves had a value abstracted from their bodies was an essential component of planter mobility. It allowed planters to establish credit predicated on the “asset value and liquid character of slave property.” As in Louisiana’s sugar regions, this was a relatively prudent act, since “capital investment in land,

⁸⁶ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 69; Watson Jennison, *Cultivating Race: The Expansion of Slavery in Georgia, 1750–1860* (Lexington: UKP, 2012), 5, 25; Martin “Slavery’s Invisible Engine,” 818–9; Richard Holcombe Kilbourne, Jr., *Debt, Investment, Slaves: Credit Relations in East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana 1825–1885* (Tuscaloosa: UALP, 1995), 39; Steve Deyle, “An ‘Abominable’ New Trade: The Closing of the African Slave Trade and the Changing Patterns of U.S. Political Power, 1808–1860,” *WMQ* 66, no. 4, Abolishing the Slave Trades: Ironies and Reverberations (October 2009), 840–841. See also Watson, *Liberty and Power*; Scott Marler, *The Merchants’ Capital: New Orleans and the Political Economy of the Nineteenth Century South* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), 91. See also Watson, *Liberty and Power*.

⁸⁷ Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 41.

⁸⁸ Baptist, “Toxic Debt,” 9; Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine,” 821. See also George Green, *Finance and Economic Development in the Old South: Louisiana Banking, 1804–1861* (Stanford: SUP, 1972); Watson, *Liberty and Power*.

labor, or machinery could always be liquidized and the collateral moved.”⁸⁹ Most significantly, slaves were moveable assets that could readily be transported to areas of high demand to maximize their value.⁹⁰

The steady expansion of the cotton frontier fueled formal and informal banking systems that made credit easily available to slaveholders along the Red River and throughout Louisiana. The CAPL allowed slaveholders to monetize their slaves by securitizing them and then leveraging them multiple times across markets. The state of Louisiana chartered its Union bank in 1832 and issued \$7 million in state bonds.⁹¹ The lack of actual currency, the use of slaves as leverage to extend credit limits to purchase more slaves, cotton, and land would come to a head with the banking crisis of 1837. Louisiana purchasers also insisted on warranties and local courts borrowed from Roman buyer protection policy to hold the seller legally responsible for “defective” slaves. Louisiana remained unique among the Southern states because of its redhibition laws, which regulated the terms of warranty for sales of slaves, and the terms under which a sale of human property could be challenged. These laws shielded slave owners against an immediate loss of slave labor.⁹² During the 1820s and 1830s, the amount of capital raised by mortgages which used slaves as collateral rose from 67 percent to 88 percent.⁹³ Armed with available slave-based credit, many Red River planters preferred investments carried out for the expansion of their plantation’s productivity. William Hutchinson reinvested his handsome returns into a mill in 1859 for use on his Caddo Parish holdings.⁹⁴ The prosperous Mathews family began to regularly ship slaves and goods to their Cocobend and Chaseland plantations from New Orleans, while concurrently paying off the mortgage held on eight slaves at eight percent interest.⁹⁵

Expansion by settlement, speculation, acquisition or war was part and parcel of United States sovereignty on the southwestern frontier.⁹⁶ White Americans saw the acquisition of property as a cultural imperative, in stark contrast to a majority of Native Americans, and remained intent on drawing lines dividing the west. Once ink was set to paper and property delineated on maps, settlers campaigned for those lines of mastery to be treated with respect.⁹⁷ Central to the settlement drive in this region was the quality of Red River land. As D. B. Allen described in 1851, the land along the Red River was a deep, burnt red color and clay-like in consistency. Few early reactions to the fertility of the land remain. However, later accounts of the land convey its splendid properties and elucidate how the quality of the land was

⁸⁹ Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planter and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820–1860* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2005), 42.

⁹⁰ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 69; Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine,” 822.

⁹¹ Baptist, “Toxic Debt,” 10, 12.

⁹² Johnson, *Soul by Soul*.

⁹³ Martin, “Slavery’s Invisible Engine,” 829, 840.

⁹⁴ J.S. Clark to W.J. Hutchinson, May 20, 1859, William Joseph Hutchinson Family and Plantation Records, Collection 075, LSUS.

⁹⁵ April 23, 1857 Slave Sale Document; September 21, 1857 Shipment of Slaves and Goods; October 4, 1856; November 5, 1857 Slave Sale Documents, Charles L. Mathews Family Papers, Mss. 910, LLMVC.

⁹⁶ Rothman, *Slave Country*, 121.

⁹⁷ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 55.

synonymous with cotton production and profit earnings. Peripatetic journalist Frederick Law Olmsted passed through the Red River region three times. In his first travel account written in 1853, he noted that “the Red River bottoms are nearly the best cotton lands in the world” and that land on the river “is now worth from \$15 to \$40 an acre. Improved plantations average, perhaps, \$20 in value.”⁹⁸ Irrespective of the land’s appeal, once in Louisiana, many slaveholders—especially those with small slaveholdings—found the price of land steep. To circumvent this obstacle, numerous newcomers squatted on the land and the practice grew so pervasive that the federal government promoted and justified it with a series of preemption laws, starting in 1841.⁹⁹

Squatting was palatable to the government because the improvements squatters made “raised the value of land in the public domain.”¹⁰⁰ John Texada, father of staunchly pro-Confederate and prominent Rapides Parish slaveholders Lewis and Joseph Texada, was one of many slaveholders who squatted on his land and subsequently purchased it using preemption. Texada settled in Rapides Parish along the lower reaches of the Red River in 1832 and his April 5, 1832 land office registry shows that “allowing preemptions by right of settlement in the public lands” he “represents that he was a settler and housekeeper” on the large lot of land for which he was given official ownership in the land grant.¹⁰¹ Preemption was a “response to continued trespassing on public lands” that grew exceedingly popular in the surge westward after the War of 1812 and was so favored by settlers that they wrote in its defense to the government. Despite the opposition of land officials to preemption, the economic climate of the mid-1830s “renewed” its usage.¹⁰² This allowed, in the main, for small slaveholders and yeoman farmers to purchase the land they had developed at a pittance, but was widely used by slaveholders, including relatively well-off individuals such as Texada. Preemption allowed people who lived on their “improved” land to buy that land “at the prescribed minimum prices” of \$1.25 an acre prior to the public sale. Settlers who purchased land via preemption were given one year to pay off the debt; failing that the government foreclosed on their land.¹⁰³ Squatters felt that their labor, or that of their slaves, had “altered the landscape” and also “given purpose to the soil.”¹⁰⁴ Being the first to lay claim to a plot of land was essential, especially in a region in which purchasing land outright was not the universal method of ownership. Getting to a location early gave a settler first pick of the land as well as first right to property and natural resources. Early inhabitants of Red River accordingly snapped up land at \$2 an acre, well before

⁹⁸ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (NY: Dix & Edwards, 1856), 628.

⁹⁹ Kilbourne, *Debt, Investment, Slaves*, 3, 64.

¹⁰⁰ Daniel Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama 1800–1840* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), 116.

¹⁰¹ John Texada Land Office Registry, April 5, 1832, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC.

¹⁰² Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business*, 200–2.

¹⁰³ Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 37.

¹⁰⁴ Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 193. Belich notes that the boom mentality is closely related to settlerism. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*, 116; Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 94.

preemption was introduced.¹⁰⁵ By 1839, land in Caddo Parish was still a “reasonable price,” with land at “\$10 per acre in the woods” though more expensive along the river.¹⁰⁶ Riverside land prices remained high, as indicated by Texada’s June 8, 1836 purchase of fifty-nine acres of land for \$73 an acre. The land was described as “adjacent to the tract belonging to them situated on the left bank of the Bayou Rapides.”¹⁰⁷ As “boom-phase farming” took hold, and commercial agriculture advanced, with settlers seeking the best river access, squatting waned in favor of direct, immediate personal ownership. Land improvements were nonetheless an “integral part of the process of claiming and controlling the wilderness” and a cleared field, a well-maintained levee or a planted crop signified ownership and mastery of the land.¹⁰⁸ Private property ownership encouraged farmers to break the cycle of squatting and incentivized the development and improvement of land. John Texada, for instance, squatted on his land in the first stage of his family’s migration. His son Lewis formally purchased land in 1852 for the sum of \$12,000. A large tract of nineteen hundred acres, the land lay on both sides of Bayou Rapides.¹⁰⁹ The proximity to the river presented a trade-off between the health of both white and black inhabitants residing along the malarial bayou and the prospect of immense financial gains from the enriched soil. For the Texada family, like many other settlers, land and cotton won out.

Lewis Texada’s attention to river frontage was sound. Plantations positioned on the river possessed several benefits, not least of which was the ease of getting staple crops to market. Like others of his class, William Powell headed west and snapped up valuable riverfront properties. He received a land grant in 1843 and moved his wife and six children from Tuscumbia, Alabama to Caddo Parish (later part of Red River Parish) and established Mount Flat Plantation. The family would continue to expand their holdings over the antebellum period to include Slate Place Plantation in Red River Parish. Letters written by Powell’s daughters shed some light on both the quality of the land and the adversarial conditions of the region for the early inhabitants. In a June 1, 1845 letter to her aunt, Jane Powell, the eldest Powell child, intertwines the profits to be reaped from the land with the peril of residing alongside the Red River. “The river is very high but is falling,” she observed, “we are in hopes the water will not overflow the land this year for our crops are finer than they ever have been our cotton is very large and in bloom.”¹¹⁰ Jane did not state explicitly whether the Powells reinforced their property’s levees, which would have “transformed the river from a “destructive” power into a force for “improving” the land,” but it is likely that given their location on the river and recent

¹⁰⁵ Preemption by settlement document, January 26, 1818, George B. Marshall Family Papers, Mss. 969, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, December 21, 1839, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁷ John Texada Land Purchase, Original June 8, 1836 and legal copy February 27, 1858, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC. The archived legal copy is in the Texada Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 67.

¹⁰⁹ Louis Texada Notarized Land Document, January 12, 1852, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC. The younger Texada’s first name is spelled as both Lewis and Louis.

¹¹⁰ Jane Powell letter to “My Dear Aunt,” June 1, 1845, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

settlement that some sort of levee protection and water drainage system was in use.¹¹¹

Görstacker likewise noted in 1844 that the Red had “dreadfully rapid water” that washed above and under the riverbanks and often overflowed its banks.¹¹² In 1828, the intricately maintained levee system extended continuously along the Mississippi some 195 miles from New Orleans to Red River landing. As migration to Red River boomed, so did attention to the levee system: as one early historian of river navigation noted, “from 1828 to 1844 they were gradually extended on the west bank from Red River to the mouth of the Arkansas.”¹¹³ Collectively, Louisiana’s river protections were immense. Calculations in 1860 estimated that the slave-built Louisiana levees cost \$12,500,000 to build and maintain.¹¹⁴ Levee systems, however, were essential for the commercial development of the plantation system. As every resident in northwestern Louisiana knew, the Red River possessed the power to provide a bountiful crop. Conversely, it could easily flood and wipe away all profit for at least a year. The power of the river would determine the outcome of inhabitants’ livelihood during the entire nineteenth century and every slaveholder along its banks kept a vigilant watch. As Jane Powell wrote her aunt, if the river remained high but not overflowing, the Powell crop would have made “about a hundred and seventy five bales of cotton” that year.¹¹⁵

Thus, the lure of the Red River was strong, but the ensuing physical and monetary hardships often gave settlers pause. Henry Marshall scouted land in Alabama and Mississippi prior to visiting Red River. Before settling near Shreveport, his letters were tinged with regret about not purchasing land in Alabama, where it was known the land was profitable. He had also felt that land was too “dear” in Yazoo County and that there the “risk in cotton is bad for a purchaser.” He was not risk averse and wished to do “better than I did in Carolina” and absolve himself of debt.¹¹⁶ Profit drove men like Marshall and he repeated his desire to generate wealth from successful crops in nearly every letter. In his letter detailing the Red, Marshall wrote, “this river is a Nile . . . it is supposed it will be settled as densely as below. Everything is on a large scale and could our friends be transported in a body I should wish no better country.”¹¹⁷ Like most settlers, he was enthralled by the prospects of the land but also felt time was of the essence. Taken by the visual appearance and agricultural promise of the land, he was exceptionally pleased with Red River, writing that it “has exceeded my anticipations. Settlers are coming in rapidly and the crops have been good.”¹¹⁸ Marshall remained exhilarated by the potential of the alluvial region and established “quarters for his negro slaves and a temporary

¹¹¹ Morris, *Big Muddy*, 95.

¹¹² Di Maio, trans., *Görstacker’s Louisiana*, 21.

¹¹³ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi*, 226.

¹¹⁴ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi*, 229.

¹¹⁵ Jane Powell letter to “My Dear Aunt”, June 1, 1845, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹¹⁶ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 1, 1833, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

¹¹⁷ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, December 22, 1833, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

¹¹⁸ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, November 28, 1836, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

residence for himself” in 1837.¹¹⁹ Swiftly drawing parallels, the Red River region appeared to be flourishing, particularly when compared to his home state. Marshall observed, “slaves are treated pretty much alike in this country when they are managed by overseers. They are fed well, have sufficient clothing and are worked all day. They are usually fed better than in S. C.” Although he ultimately settled closer to Shreveport, Marshall indicated from the outset that easy transportation of the staple crop formed an important factor in plantation location: “I should prefer a place near Alexandria on account of the convenience of getting to it.”¹²⁰ For Marshall, like others, it took time and the accumulation of funds to migrate and this process took most settlers a few years. For instance, in an 1857 letter from J. Prestuge to established DeSoto Parish planter William Benson, Prestuge outlined the steps already taken to facilitate his move from Virginia: “I brought out from Richmond 36 negroes. This fall I have sold a few . . . I have a good blacksmith and waggon maker.” Towards the close of the letter, he summed up his goals and gauged the average time necessary to move a plantation across the southern states: “I intend to sell out oh very fair property as soon as I can and go to planting somewhere in the west, to do this . . . it will take me two or three years.”¹²¹

Gathering capital, slaves, and credit were not the only preconditions for migration. Men often chose spouses from within their own social milieu and frequently married as a precursor to westward migration. With few single women in the Red River area, marriage prior to migration was a necessity for many men. The urgency to marry before relocation is underscored by the average female marriage age hovering around the late teens and early twenties while the male age remained closer to thirty.¹²² Throughout the South, the median age of marriage for women was twenty whereas the median age for men was twenty-eight.¹²³ Some men, like Henry Marshall, left their wives behind on established holdings while seeking land on the frontier. For young women accustomed to established society and the close proximity of kin, the isolation of frontier life remained less than appealing to prospective brides and slaveholding wives. As in other parts of the expanding South, white women ordinarily came to the Red River with a migrating family unit or through marriage or a migrating family unit, since brides moved wherever husbands desired. As such, women with family in the newly settled districts often tried to convince spouses to follow her kin in chain migration so that she might maintain family connections.¹²⁴ White women, however, seldom found migration to be an easy process. Indeed, female settlers commonly compared migration to death and found the new landscapes and homes “dull, empty, even repellent.” As Joan Cashin notes, the comparison between migration and death was so frequent in correspondence that it is sometimes hard to tell if the relative

¹¹⁹ Ancestral Homes of DeSoto Document, Josephine Chatham Means Collection, Collection 335, LSUS.

¹²⁰ Henry Marshall letter to Maria Marshall, December 22, 1833, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

¹²¹ J. Prestuge to W. Benson, March 25, 1857, Benson Family Papers, Mss. 2424, 2440, LLMVC.

¹²² Burke, *On Slavery's Border*, 63. For further examples, see Oakes, *The Ruling Race*; Baptist, *Creating an Old South*; Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*; Miller, *South by Southwest*; Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*; Cashin, *A Family Venture*.

¹²³ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (NY: Pantheon, 1982), 60, 233.

¹²⁴ Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, 166–167.

moved or died.¹²⁵ Since white women defined their world in terms of proximity to family, letters from frontier women, including those in the Red River region, were peppered with imploring pleas for family members to relocate.¹²⁶

Jane Powell related a lonely inhabitation on the edge of the Louisiana wilderness. Male settlers outnumbered Jane and her female siblings. In her letters, Jane remarked that a movement of settlers from the river to the hills left the neighborhood “very dull” and “society is very indifferent” in large part because “there are no young ladies within fifty miles of our house either up or down the river.” A great many gentlemen live in the area, which was in keeping with the rapid, male-oriented bent of western settlement, and Jane earnestly awaited the improving of society “as some of our old batchelors have married lately and intend on bringing there families to the river.”¹²⁷ The improvement and civilizing of the region became a staple talking point in newspapers and letters. Civilization was a coded term to express stability, settled society, and importantly, a shift away from the primitive frontier. Civilization was used as a sales tactic by slaveholding men to entice their wives into relocation and by women hopeful that kin would join them in the region. When writing to his wife back in South Carolina, Henry Marshall utilized the gradual “filling up with respectable people and an episcopal clergyman from Tennessee” as an inducement for his wife to relocate.¹²⁸ Greenwood, an enclave a few miles west of Shreveport, captured particular attention for its civilized aspects. The *Caddo Gazette* published an article about the village boasting, “our village has four horse stage coach passing through it twice a day.”¹²⁹ Greenwood featured Caddo Parish’s first brick home; the Whitworth plantation—later known as the Howell Plantation—stood from 1839 and “became the scene of many gala social functions.”¹³⁰

Just as slaveholders sought to shape the landscape, they also transformed the local population. Demographic data from Natchitoches, Caddo, Bossier, DeSoto, and Rapides Parishes shows a steady increase in young white male emigration throughout the antebellum period. Caddo, Bossier, and DeSoto were carved out of Natchitoches parish in 1840 and 1850 respectively and this accounts for the anomalous pattern of white males recorded in figure one. Settlement accelerated between 1830 and 1840 as the second wave of settlers reached the Red River. By 1850–1860, the “boom” period had passed but the region was still experiencing expansion. Between 1830 and 1840, the total number of white males increased 87%, with a total of 4526 men migrating. From 1840–1850 the total number of white males increased 54%, with a total of 5243 relocated individuals. In the last antebellum decade, the total number of white males increased 41% with 6216 settlers. The census figures indicate that there was a slowing

¹²⁵ Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 45, 65.

¹²⁶ Cashin, *A Family Venture*, 94.

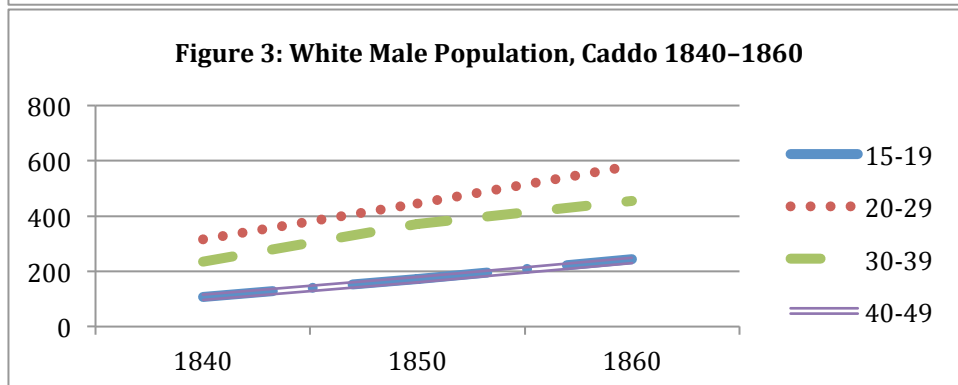
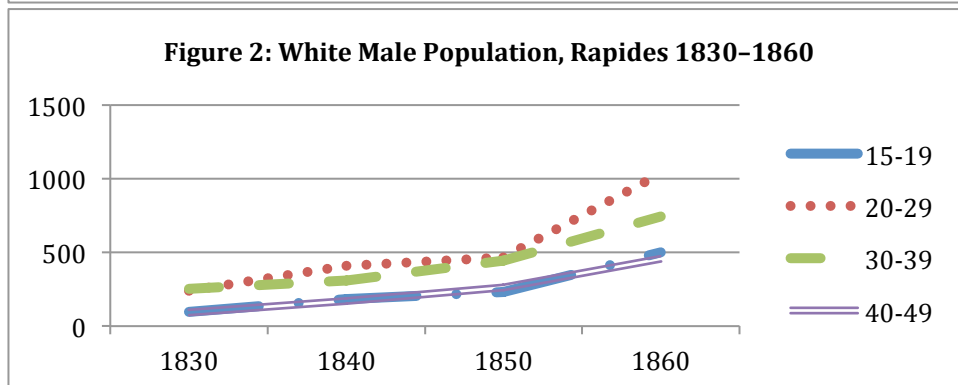
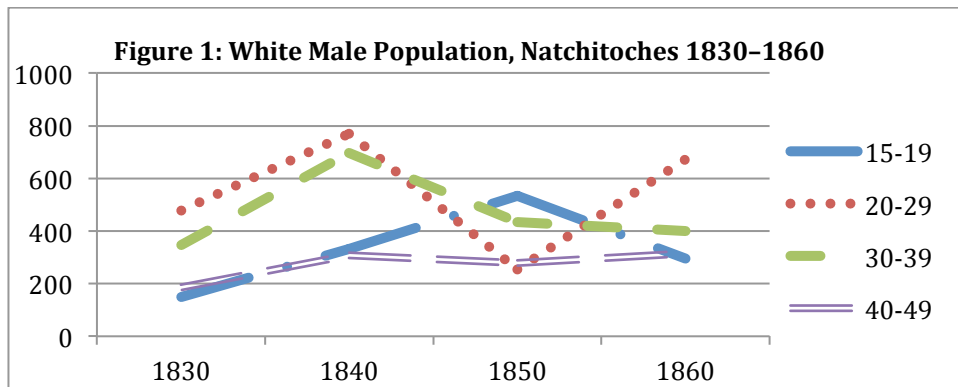
¹²⁷ Jane Powell letter to “My Dear Aunt,” June 1, 1845, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship* offers a different perspective on the female experience on the frontier.

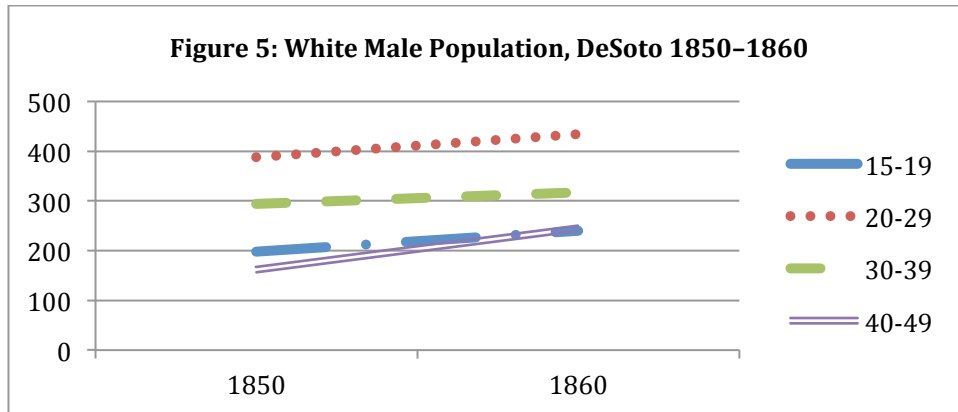
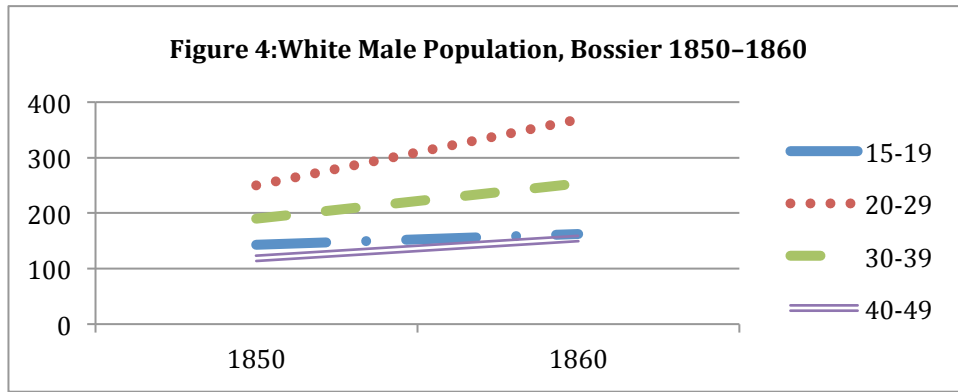
¹²⁸ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, December 24, 1841, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

¹²⁹ *Caddo Gazette*, June 2, 1855.

¹³⁰ Hodgson, “Forest Park,” 36.

rate of settlement but more white men were moving to Red River, as shown by the continued strong rates of growth. Although the percent of growth slowed over thirty years, the region was attracting more slaveholders. The following figures underscore the steady growth of the regional white male population and subsets by age brackets. Predictably, Red River settlement skewed towards younger males with those aged 20–29 in the vanguard. By contrast, older men aged forty and above were fewer. By 1860, however, a very considerable white population had emerged across the region and as later chapters will detail, few of these men, who had migrated westward in pursuit of cotton and slavery, were willing to surrender the economic and racial institution that had collectively enriched them since the 1830s.





Whether in their mid-twenties or somewhat older, migrants recognized that after a few years in the area, the finances and prospects for early settling families improved. The Powell's early settlement in northwest Louisiana allowed them to "profit from the subsequent rise" in the value, desirability, and productivity of their holding.¹³¹ But for all their wealth, settlers like William Powell still privileged business interest over luxury. "Comfort could wait," noted a contemporary about settlers like Powell. Slaveholders were not devoid of taste but rather "it is their principle to make it yield to interest."¹³² Three years later Powell began the process of making his holding more palatable. He expended resources, monetary and labor, to build a more permanent residence. His daughter Pirella wrote, "the dwelling in which we now reside is not worthy of a name it was built for an overseers house . . . now preparing to build a brick house which I hope will be worthy of a name."¹³³ Her statement captures the type of frontier settlement found along Red River and its gradual transformation. In conjunction with building a more prestigious home, Powell steadily expanded his plantation and its cotton growing potential with the purchase of more slaves in 1847. The vicinity in which the Powell plantation stood was booming by the late 1840s and pressure increased for the establishment of a local post office. The clamoring for a post office highlights the dramatic developments in the region since post offices played "a critical role in mediating political messages" and steamboat packets delivered the private letters and commercial correspondence vital to the fiscal success of the region's

¹³¹ Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest*, 67.

¹³² Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 97.

¹³³ Jane Powell letter to "My Dear Aunt," June 1, 1845, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

slaveholders.¹³⁴ Fervor for regular post delivery and routes peppered the regional newspapers. For many local settlers, post offices and regular postal service also symbolized the region's relative modernity, its urban development, and political connection. The connected nature of Red River with the rest of the nation indicated the extent of regional development.

Large-scale slaveholding existed in the region, but was overshadowed by small and mid-range planters who were at the fore of regional transformation. Even with the expansion of personal fortunes, entrenchment of slavery, and strengthened commercial routes from the Red River downriver to New Orleans, the census shows that most Red River slaveholders were small to midsize. The heavy clustering of slaveholders with fewer than ten slaves on the 1860 census suggests that ascension to the planter class was difficult, but not impossible. However, many individuals remained successful small slaveholders. Thus, as James Oakes has elucidated, it was the non-elite who were willing to press on to new regions in pursuit of greater capital gains.¹³⁵ As had been true for slaveholders moving to upcountry Georgia post-1820, cotton proved the medium through which yeomen and small slaveholders could “imagine a more prosperous life.” The purchase of an initial slave or the procurement of additional slaves “constituted merely the first step” in the progression within the slaveholding class.¹³⁶ Large-scale planters comprised two or three percent of southern white males yet held over fifty percent of the southern slaves. The vast majority of southern slaveholders owned no more than five slaves, with twenty slaves marking one as a planter.¹³⁷

Slaveholders who settled along the fertile banks of the Red River were overwhelmingly small slaveholders and like their forefathers in the eastern seaboard slave states, many saw slaveholding as an escalator of personal progress. Above all, they focused on securing their position—and that of their kinsmen—along the alluvial river way. Some slaveholders amassed wealth and capital, but most plantations along the Red were small to mid-size slaveholdings. As a result, while the Red River region produced vast wealth from cotton, few of the regions' slaveholders were planters, and newly minted planters or those in possession of more land and slaves were not preoccupied with entrenched expressions of wealth. Especially during the nascent stages of settlement, many slaveholders with just one chattel relocated to the region. As frontier settlement gave way to expansion, single slaveholders remained a strong component of the free population, but the number of slaveholders owning more slaves became more numerous. By 1850, small slaveholders owning twenty or fewer slaves were most common. The number of planters increased over time, largely because the accumulation of wealth through

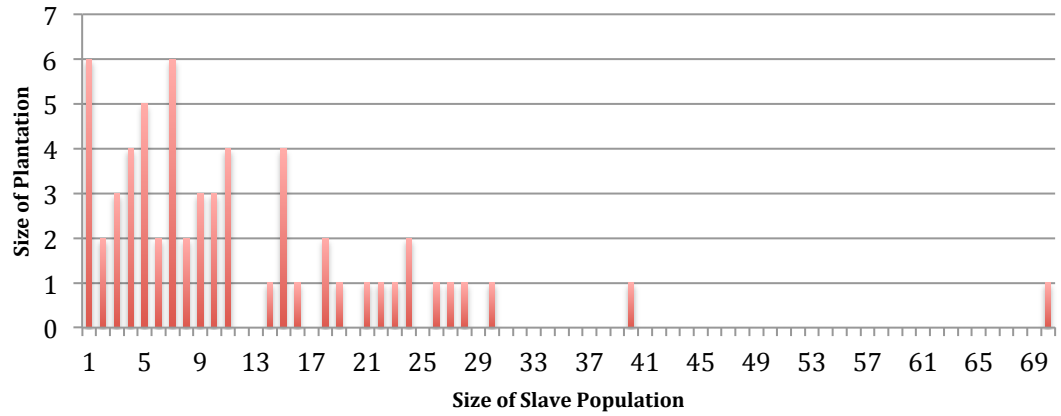
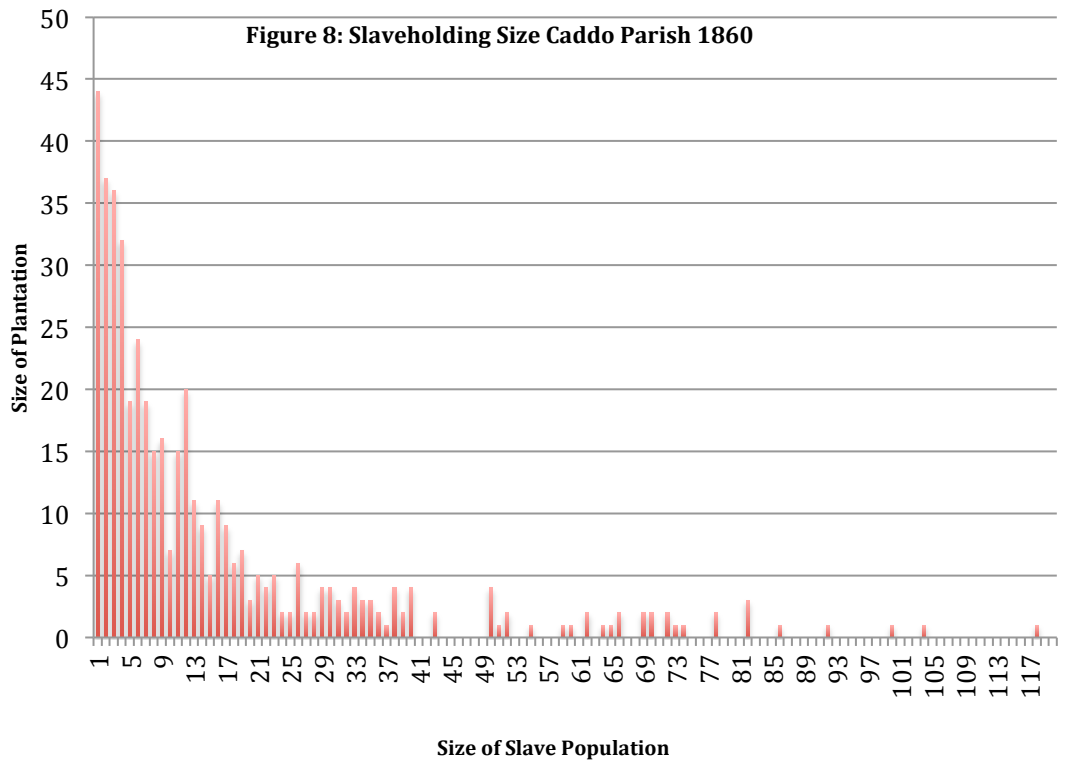
¹³⁴ Keumsoo Hong, “The Structural Transformation of the Antebellum Red River Valley Settlement Systems in Louisiana,” in John Heppen and Samuel Otterstrom, eds., *Geography, History, and the American Political Economy* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 71.

¹³⁵ Oakes, *The Ruling Race*, 38.

¹³⁶ Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, 238.

¹³⁷ James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (NY: Vintage, 1991), 92; Follett, *The Sugar Masters*, 33. For consensus on determining holding size see Mark Smith, *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South* (NY: CUP, 1998); Kolchin, *American Slavery*.

land and slaves took several years. Planters owning more than fifty slaves made up a small portion of the population. Data compiled from the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules, a complementary codicil to the general census, illustrates the size of holdings in Caddo Parish and the number of plantations of each size. Louisiana's parishes were divided into districts in the 1850 census. Two districts, Blossom Hill and Albany and Isles, are both in the vicinity of modern-day Shreveport. In 1850, 19 out of 86 Blossom Hill slaveholders, or 22%, owned 20 or more slaves, while 7 out of 86 slaveholders, or 8%, had more than 30 slaves. 21% percent, or 18 of the 86 slaveholders, owned half the slave population. This range includes slaveholders with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 53 slaves, with an average (mean) slaveholding of 12.6 slaves. The median figure was 9.5, underscoring the large number of slaveholders with a relatively few slaves. By contrast, in 1850 Albany and Isles had 11 out of 60 slaveholders, or 18%, who owned 20 or more slaves; 2 out of 60, or 3%, owned more than 30 chattels. 12 out of 60 slaveholders, or 20%, owned half the slave population. The range for this district was from 1 to 70 slaves, with an average (mean) slaveholding of 11.9 and a median of 8.5. In both locations, the most numerous holdings were those with one slave, with spikes in ownership around 7, 11, and 16 slaves in Blossom Hill and 5, 7, and 11 in Albany and Isles. Both districts had fewer than 10 plantations with more than 30 slaves. The composite picture of slaveholding in these two broadly representative parishes reinforces the relatively small-scale dimension of slaveholding in this region. Slavery was thus more evenly distributed among the region's free population, with many individuals owning slaves, despite the majority of masters being small-scale farmers. The 1860 census takers did not break the parish into districts, but the data shows an increase in slaveholding size over the previous decade. 103 out of 445 slaveholders, or 23%, owned 20 or more slaves and 64 out of 445 individuals, or 14%, owned 30 or more slaves. 15%, or 66 out of 445 slaveholders, owned more than half the district's slaves. The range was from 1 to 118 slaves with an average (mean) slaveholding of 15 and a median of 8. Thus, while a large number of small slaveholders continued to work the land with 1 to 5 slaves, the number of large planters had increased by 1860, in tandem with accelerated land and slave accumulation. Nevertheless, as the following charts indicate, the overall tenor of Red River slaveholding was geared to the small and mid-sized slaveholder.

Figure 6: Slaveholding Size Caddo Parish, Blossom Hill 1850**Figure 7: Slaveholding Size Caddo Parish, Albany and Iles 1850****Figure 8: Slaveholding Size Caddo Parish 1860**

The presence of small slaveholders and yeoman farmers on the Red River led to other developmental changes. Federal census data shows that land acquisition and settled population grew rapidly in the antebellum decades and by 1850 the regional population was 46,015, including slave and free inhabitants. By 1860, the total regional population was 78,845. Cotton was the principal cash crop and in the final decade of the antebellum era, the region expanded production with crop values increasing four-fold from just over \$9.6 million to over \$41.6 million.¹³⁸ The lure of cheap land and the necessity of slave labor to meet plantation requirements had turned the internal slave trade into a “common form of commerce.”¹³⁹ Slave traders and slaveholders traded people “along the bottom of the triangle; profits would stick at the top” and, in this way, from 1820 to 1860 the urban and rural slave trade saw “people passed through the trade, representing something close to half a billion dollars in property.”¹⁴⁰ As Louisiana, and especially the cotton-producing region of the Red River, boomed and attracted new residents, slaves were transferred in unprecedented numbers from areas of the South where there was deemed to be an excess to areas where slaves were most in demand.¹⁴¹ New Orleans and Natchez boomed as slave trading centers from the 1820s. In turn, Louisiana’s redhibition laws specifically protected the buyer of a slave from any “physical, moral or mental defects of the slave” and were created in direct response to the “questionable business practices” of the abundant slave traders. Robert Gudmestad notes that the interstate slave trade in combination with migrating owners across the Deep South in the Upper South “combined to coerce approximately one million bondservants to cross state lines between 1790 and 1860.”¹⁴² The domestic slave trade strongly cemented the regional commitment to slavery as both an institution and labor supply. The impact of the internal slave trade on market forces transformed southern society and was part of the larger national development of the market revolution. The price of slaves often correlated to cotton prices and the demand of planters in the new cotton regions who were willing to pay high prices for more hands. Slave prices were no longer dependent on local demand but rather upon what any slaveholder was willing to pay.¹⁴³

Decennial census numbers for the Red River region indicate that the slave population steadily increased from 1830 to 1860 and grew at a much faster rate than the white population, in large measure due to imports from the interregional slave trade. Aggregate slave population for Natchitoches, Caddo, Bossier, Rapides, and DeSoto parishes shows that between 1830 and 1840 the slave population had increased by 125% and the total white population had decreased in relation to the enslaved from 40% in 1830 to 39% ten years later. Slaves continued to be

¹³⁸ (2004) Historical Census Browser. <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu>

¹³⁹ Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 4.

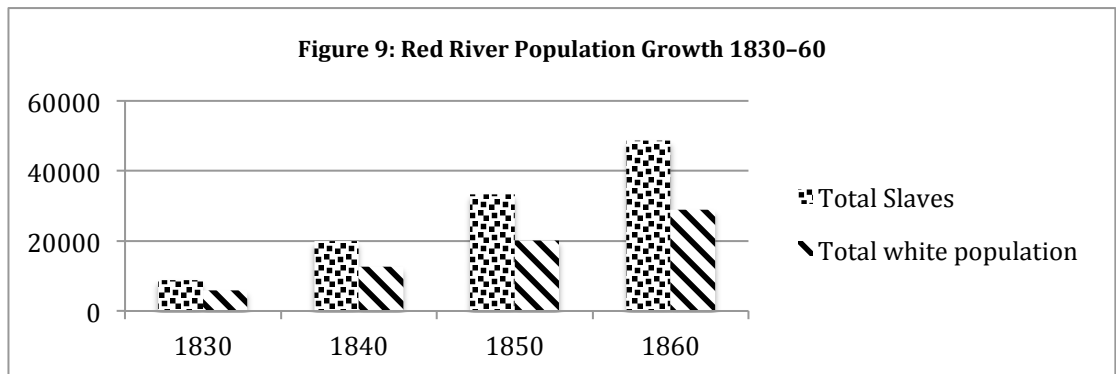
¹⁴⁰ Johnson, *Soul by Soul*, 6.

¹⁴¹ Ann Patton Malone, *Sweet Chariot: Slave Family and Household Structure in Nineteenth-Century Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1992), 29; Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 4.

¹⁴² Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2003), 97, 8, 20.

¹⁴³ Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 5–7, 57; Deyle, “An “Abominable” New Trade: The Closing of the African Slave Trade and the Changing Patterns of U.S. Political Power, 1808–1860”: 836, 839.

relocated from 1840 to 1850, with a population increase of 67% over the decade. The last decade of the antebellum period witnessed a 46% increase in the slave population. Natchitoches Parish, which included modern day Natchitoches, Caddo, Bossier, and DeSoto Parishes, had a total slave population of 3,571 in 1830. The parish's slave population increased 86% by 1840. Natchitoches experienced a decline when Caddo Parish was carved out of it prior to the 1840 census followed by DeSoto Parish in 1850. Slave population growth dropped to 18% for Natchitoches between 1840 and 1850 and increased to 20% between 1850 and 1860. Caddo saw an 84% increase in slave population in its first decade and a 41% increase from 1850–1860. Caddo was split in 1843 to create Bossier Parish. From 1850 to 1860, Bossier witnessed an 80% growth in slaves, while DeSoto grew 90%. Irrespective of the changing of parish borders, these numbers highlight the visible black majority and population growth due to relocation to the region that outpaced white settlement. As figure nine illustrates, the Red River was not just a slave society but it was one where slavery outpaced white settlement.



The censuses of 1850 and 1860 are unique in that the standard portion of the census is accompanied with the bluntly named slave schedules. Very rarely were names jotted down for the enslaved, leaving the historical observer with a long list of ages and sexes. However, these slave schedules help to shade in the size and contours of the Red River slave population. Similar to slaveholders across the cotton South, Red River owners wanted young, strong, and hardy slaves. The demand and preference for young slaves on the frontier was a by-product of the nature of cotton cultivation as a staple crop and driven by the necessity for brawn and endurance for clearing land.¹⁴⁴ By design, the slave population also replaced itself. The 1850s slave schedule numbers indicate that a very large number of children resided in the Red River region, with Blossom Hill containing 139 females five and under, 117 males five and under, 78 females and 76 males between ages six and ten and 75 females and 85 males between ages 11 and 15. The decline in the relative size of the cohorts derived from infant mortality and the loss of children from disease and infections. Neighboring Albany and Iles had fewer slaves, but followed the same trend regarding infants and children born into slavery in the region. The

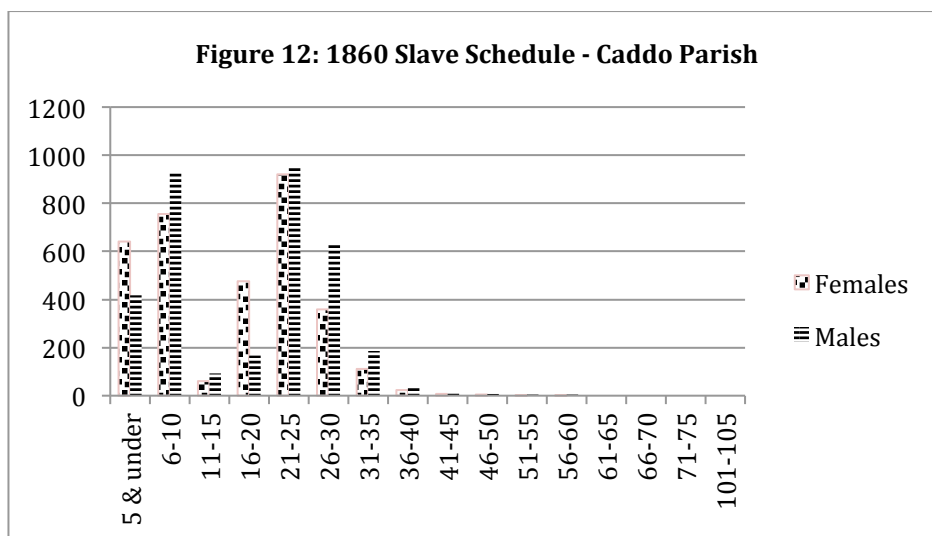
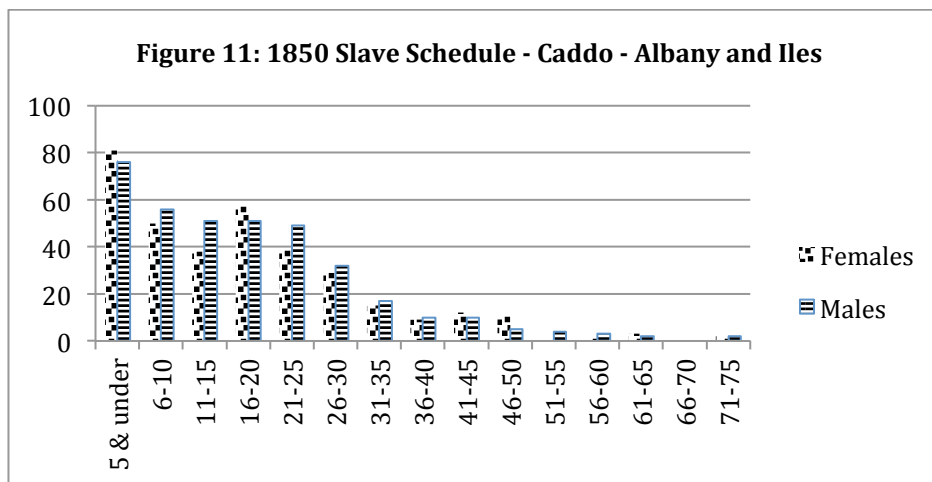
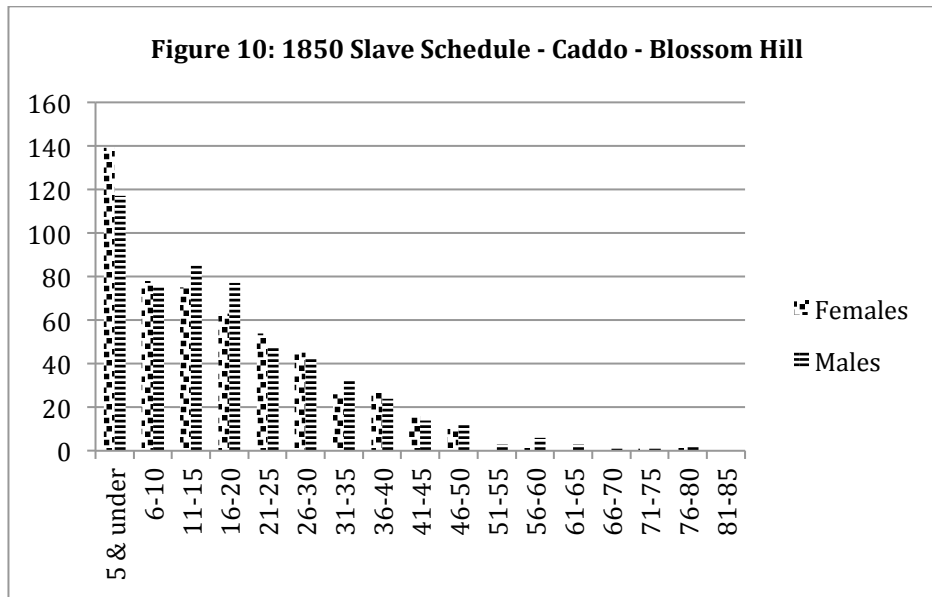
¹⁴⁴ Steven Miller, "Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama Mississippi Black Belt, 1815–1840," in Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan, eds, *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and The Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas* (Charlottesville: UVA, 1993), 158.

schedules document 81 females five and under, 76 males five and under, 50 females and 56 male slaves aged six to ten and 38 females and 51 males between 11 and 15 years of age. This demographic is emblematic of a slave population with relatively high rates of fertility, but persistently high infant and child mortality rates, ultimately reducing the number of mature adults.

Throughout the region the slave population ratio of male to female slaves was balanced. Predictably, the younger adult age groups were predominant, with the 16–20, 21–25, 26–30, and 31–35 age ranges the largest. Young people populated plantations, a trend that enabled slaveholders to rigorously extract both labor and progeny from their youthful slaves. Though the desire for a self-perpetuating slave population was not unique to this region, the lack of older slaves underscores the exploitative and age defined labor orientation of Red River slaveholders. Following the aforementioned age brackets, defined as prime hands, there was a sharp decline among the older population. Noticeably fewer slaves comprise the 36–40 and 41–45 range with a miniscule, single-digit population over the age of 45. These slaves were part of the initial settlement generations of the 1830s and 1840s, but by the 1850s slaveholders were not acquiring older slaves.

By 1860 the slave population in Caddo had burgeoned and the age distribution varied slightly from the prior decade. The three largest age brackets in 1860 were five and under with 640 females and 418 males, 6–10 with 755 female and 930 male slaves, and 920 females and 953 males aged 21–25. There was an extremely stark drop in slaves aged between 11–15, a range containing only 60 females and 92 males. This cohort, aged 1–5 in 1850, might have fallen victim to the 1853 yellow fever outbreak. By contrast, a huge increase of 695% occurred in the female slave population aged 16–20 versus the aforementioned age group. There was an 82% growth in the male population aged 16–20. From that age cohort until 26–30, the slave population continued to expand. Noticeably, the population plummeted drastically after age 30. There was a 69% decrease in the female population between ages 26–30 and 36–40. Likewise for males in these age ranges, the population dropped 71%. This extreme diminishment continued dramatically through the next age ranges, with the number of enslaved aged 36–40 less than half that of the previous five-year cohort. Slave numbers in the higher age groups remained in single digits. As this data and the following figures indicate, slavery along the Red River remained a youthful phenomenon. Young men slightly exceeded their female compatriots but seldom were they aged over 40. Dragooned by planters, slaveholders, and overseers who themselves were generally aged from mid-twenties to mid-thirties, Red River holdings featured work gangs chiefly comprised of prime aged hands for cotton farming. Through selective investment in the internal slave trade and in forced relocations across the southern slave frontier, Red River masters possessed the raw human material for a booming cotton economy. Though

slave children undoubtedly died along the Red River, the population was geared to agricultural production and the success of cotton cultivation.



As in other parts of the slave frontier, between 60 and 70 percent of slave movement was a result of interregional trade. This large-scale slave migration created “separate slave-

exporting and slave-importing regions.”¹⁴⁵ Slaves might be acquired for a growing plantation from the large firms operating slave markets in New Orleans and Natchez or from a local slave trader. Zack Howell, for instance, moved to Caddo Parish from Chester, South Carolina in the twilight years of the antebellum period. Howell married Isabella Whitworth, whose family holdings lay in Caddo and East Texas, and resided at her plantation, Forest Park. Like other westward-migrating planters, Howell trafficked slaves back and forth across the region, in addition to operating his plantation. Many local traders like Howell solicited their own business and often had regular recruitment areas within a county or two of their homes. This close proximity gave these traders a familiarity with their customers and local sales, which often proved an advantage.¹⁴⁶ As Howell’s correspondence reveals, slave trading was singularly depersonalized. The first entry in his 1859 diary, states “left home this day for Charleston to take charge of some negroes belonging to E. D. Golfraith.” Howell brought a coffle of 36 slaves consisting of twelve males, eighteen women and six children to Charleston for Golfraith. His diary does not disclose whether these slaves were then sold on behalf of Mr. Golfraith or were being returned to Charleston to pay off a debt. In total, the coffle of slaves he brought to Charleston equaled \$25,600 of slave property. Like other slave traders, Howell listed slave names and prices in a ledger with little other information. Howell’s operations hinged on the success of self-funded “slave buying expeditions.”¹⁴⁷ Rarely did Howell bother to learn a slave’s name; he commodified them as chattel by using repeat names or nouns. In an 1859 entry, for instance, he lists “woman + five kids \$4200,” and is selling three women named Mary and two sets of women named Nancy and Martha. September through February was considered prime slave-selling season, and like other traders, Howell returned to Louisiana in September 1860.¹⁴⁸ Howell was thus able to oversee his crop and sell slaves without relying exclusively on the slave trade as his “principle or steady income.”¹⁴⁹ Howell’s next diary entry records the sale of \$27,925 of human property—or twenty-four slaves—to various slaveholders in southwest Arkansas. Throughout 1860 Howell continued to traffic slaves in and out of the Red River region, importing groups ranging from fourteen slaves to twenty-four. Howell filled a niche and much like the rural merchants who provided credit to small slaveholders, human tradesmen like Howell provided an essential local service that enabled small-holding slaveholders to buy and sell their chattel with relative ease. The closest and most extensive slave markets to the Red River were located in New Orleans, Natchez, and Vicksburg, all several days away and relatively costly to visit. By contrast, Howell and other local itinerant slaveholders who doubled as slave traders filled a void in the region’s slave-driven economy by bringing in slaves to be

¹⁴⁵ Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 44. See also Deyle, “An ‘Abominable’ New Trade.”

¹⁴⁶ Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 106.

¹⁴⁷ Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 67.

¹⁴⁹ April 18, 1859 Diary Entry, Zack Howell Pocket Diary for 1859, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS. His diary logs trip to Texas, Arkansas, Memphis, New Orleans, Charleston, and throughout the Red River region. Gudmestad, *A Troublesome Commerce*, 5.

sold in the immediate locale. Howell's diary indicates that he catered to slaveholders throughout the Red River region—extending into Arkansas and westward into Texas.¹⁵⁰

Howell traveled extensively with the slaves he bought and sold. He left for Texas with slaves on November 8, 1859 and arrived home from Texas “four months gone” on March 8, 1860 before leaving “for the west to sale negroes” on April 10, 1860.¹⁵¹ He traversed the country to sell a female slave, Jane, in Charleston on August 22, 1860, where he “expect[ed] to buy one and then leave for Arkansas.” Howell sold Jane to A.G. Cary, a planter in Desha County, Arkansas on September 26, 1860 for \$1350. Howell obviously recouped his expenses and making good money from his interstate slave sales, as he had purchased Jane a month earlier for \$955. Interestingly, on the same day that Howell sold Jane, he also hired her out for fifty cents per day to one Mr. Kay of Monticello, Arkansas. Hiring out was not uncommon, and this pattern of hiring out is emblematic of small holding masters who lost no chance to make money.¹⁵² As he wrote in his entry, “she worked one day and I sold her for \$1350.” The same day he sold Jane, he also sold Mr. Cary a slave named Joe from whom he made a \$220 profit.¹⁵³ Howell's business operations suited the rapidly growing needs of Red River slaveholders. He provided a fairly regular supply of bondpeople and responded swiftly to the flexible market of opportunities prevalent in northwest Louisiana. His diary, like the lists that enumerated slaves on Red River plantations, reduced the enslaved to saleable commodities. The pages that comprise the lion's share of the diary are filled with lists titled “cost of the following negroes,” and the mercantile language employed in describing human chattel substantiate the overwhelming perception of slaves as tradable commodities.

Howell, of course, was not the only itinerant slave trader within the region. Some slaveholders reinvested wealth or purchased slaves on credit from major New Orleans operators to expand plantation size and production capabilities. John Hutchinson's sons, Robert and William, purchased \$10,950 worth of slave property—nine slaves in total—from a trader in New Orleans in 1852. The slaves purchased included six males—aged 24, 18, 15, and three 19 year olds—and three females, aged 17, 18, and 20. The Hutchinsons purchased prime working-age slaves, including one slave trained as a blacksmith, in order to increase output on their plantations in the coming seasons. The brothers had added acreage and slaves to their main plantation, Rocky Mount Place, and started clearing land in south Caddo Parish in 1851. By 1852 they had a small cotton crop planted. They purchased the land in June 1852, paying \$11,324.88 for 944 acres. A few years later this estate became William's main plantation,

¹⁵⁰ September 28, 1860 Diary Entry; Undated Diary Entry, Zack Howell Pocket Diary for 1859, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

¹⁵¹ November 8, 1859 Diary Entry; March 8, 1860 Diary Entry; April 10, 1860 Diary Entry, Zack Howell Pocket Diary for 1859, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

¹⁵² Jonathan Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge: HUP, 2004).

¹⁵³ August 22, 1860 Diary Entry; September 26, 1860 Diary Entry, Zack Howell Pocket Diary for 1859, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

Caspiana, when Robert sold his plantation interests in Caddo to his brother.¹⁵⁴ Likewise, William Powell invested in his future by purchasing four slaves on May 5, 1843.¹⁵⁵ Powell purchased outright a slave family of five consisting of parents aged about 35 and three young children for \$1500. Two years later Powell purchased five young male hands from a trader in Maryland for \$3875.¹⁵⁶ Powell's receipts show he bought slaves approximately every two years until 1852 when he made successive yearly purchases.¹⁵⁷ Powell favored purchasing complete families, which was not always a priority among slaveholders, and this may have occurred out of convenience. With his plantation expanding, there would have been plenty of work for all hands. The Hutchinson brothers and Powell expanded their slave populations as they acquired or anticipated an influx of money. Their purchasing habits show that Red River slaveholders acquired their chattel in diverse ways. In some cases, slaveholders turned to local agents or traveled to New Orleans to procure individuals, small groups, and occasionally larger coffles of enslaved peoples. At other times, masters like William Powell purchased family units or groups of young men. They acquired slaves sporadically and sometimes from agents with business connections spread across the slave states. Devoid of paternalism, this type of consumerism enabled Red River planters to man their work crews relatively effectively, drawing upon slave markets wherever and whenever needed.

For slaveholders residing in the Red River, the aim was not to recreate the luster and grandeur of the sugar parish homes in the southern part of Louisiana or to transplant the polish of Upper and Lower South plantation homes. The slaveholders who relocated to this region were fuelled by the ethos of westward expansion and informed by the increasing international need for cotton. This demand transformed slavery into a lucrative, modern, export-driven enterprise where slaves and cotton were traded indeterminately as human and agricultural commodities. The removal of the Red River Raft cemented the importance of this region to frontier-market integration and supported the growth in migration and cotton exportation. Red River slaveholders like Powell, Marshall, and the Hutchinsons were fully immersed in the market economy by the close of the antebellum era. It was this commitment to land, cotton, and slaves that propelled regional growth from frontier holdings to settled plantations by mid-1850s. Though the region contained more free women and established holdings by 1860, the solid base of this society was slavery and cotton. Small slaveholders and mid-sized planters dominated cotton operations but all shared a region-wide commitment to slavery, cotton, and the race-based power structure of the antebellum South. The rough-hewn nature of the region spawned a brutal culture that shaped enslavement into a chaotic, violent regime.

¹⁵⁴ Hutchinson McClellan, *William Joseph Hutchinson and Family of Caspiana Plantation*, 24–5. The Hutchinson holdings in Caddo were Rocky Mount, Caspiana, and Magnolia Plantations.

¹⁵⁵ May 5, 1843 Slave Receipt, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹⁵⁶ March 2, 1847 Slave Receipt; April 26, 1849 Slave Receipt, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹⁵⁷ May 3, 1852 Slave Receipt; January 24, 1853 Slave Receipt; March 8, 1853 Slave Receipt; January 28, 1854 Slave Receipt, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

Chapter Two

The Fingerprint of Slavery: The Cotton Complex and Enslavement

Settlement in the Red River was driven by available expanses of fertile land and a growing worldwide demand for good quality cotton. The opening of the Red River Raft connected this cotton frontier and its export-driven slaveholders with the commercial warehouses and international marketplace of New Orleans. Market integration made cotton farming along the Red River hugely successful and resulted in an extractive, profit focused cotton regime. From the 1810s, slaveholders from across the South pushed into the region in search of rich soil, giving rise to a slave regime that maximized the land, environmental resources, and enslaved labor. The brutish perception of slaves derived from a slaveholding mentality that commodified land, labor, and capital. This commodification fashioned a harsh foundation for enslavement and impacted the work regime and the lives of Red River slaves.

Cotton cultivation shaped the daily work rhythms and set the basis for plantation life. Conditions for cotton production proved harsh for slaves transported to this region. Enslaved people, nonetheless, turned undeveloped land into functional, productive, and thriving cotton fields. They cleared the land, broke the soil, chopped or thinned out the young cotton plants, picked the cotton, manned the gin that separated seed from fiber, packed the crop into bales and, lastly, lugged the heavy white bales to the riverfront before steamboats transported it to market. In 1831, the United States produced about 350 million pounds of cotton, just under half of the world's raw cotton, and by 1835 this amount had surged to over 500 million pounds. The United States produced more than 800 million pounds of cotton in 1839.¹ By 1860, the southern states produced over 4.5 million bales of cotton; enslaved labor underpinned the expansion of a regime that was euphemistically dubbed King Cotton. This white gold profited slaveholders from the Carolinas to Texas, shipping agents in New York and New Orleans, and Boston merchants alike. The scale and scope of the American cotton economy affected communities throughout the nation. Nowhere was this truer than along the banks of the Red River. There, the peaks and troughs of cotton prices throughout the antebellum period influenced the pace and form of migration to the region. The feverish production of cotton was an outgrowth of both market demand and market price. International cotton brokers in New Orleans, Charleston, London, Liverpool, and Paris dictated the terms of exchange and slaveholders were almost inevitably "price-takers" in the cotton market. Nonetheless, cotton prices remained relatively buoyant through much of the antebellum period, providing wealth and opportunities for

¹ Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*, 6; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Clifton: Augustus Kelley Publishers, 1973), 691.

slaveholders and grinding enslavement for the region's slaves.² On the eve of the Civil War and at the apex of the cotton boom, three quarters of the South's slave population labored in cotton fields. In the main, cotton was sent to Great Britain to satisfy that nation's market demand, which rose from an annual average of less than 222,000,000 pounds for 1830–1832 to nearly 713,000,000 for 1853–1855.³ British demand greased the wheels of southern commerce, offering riches to those who could master the crop and slave labor. Along the southern cotton frontier, farmers flocked to the opportunity, converting the Deep South into a vast cotton-raising slave-based plantation society that extended westward along the rivers. By the 1830s, cotton fever gripped the Trans-Mississippi West, with cotton assuming regal authority in northern Louisiana. Though cotton did not require a significant outlay of capital to begin operations, the geographic concerns and climate woes of the Red River region presented a particular set of circumstances to overcome in the production and maintenance of a crop.⁴ The river often flooded and required engineering expertise, predominantly from slaves, for the construction of floodgates, maintenance of levees, and diagonal plowing to minimize run-off and dislodged cotton seeds. The unpredictable nature of cotton cultivation placed the region's slaves into a crushing world of labor that seesawed with the work pace and the expectations and violence meted out by the master class.⁵ This chapter explores the dark laboring world of Red River slaves and considers the centrality of the cotton crop to life and labor in this region while exploring the harsh, brutal regime that emerged in this westernmost portion of the cotton south.

This crushing world of dawn to dusk labor was founded upon the most important commodity of the nineteenth century. Cotton, according to the *American Cotton Planter*, was not just considered the “controlling influence of commerce, but it is emphatically, the barometer of commerce.” It was important commercially and nationally and its “buoyancy or depression in the markets of the world” foretold the value of many other commodities and productions.⁶ Cotton dictated markets and labor because of the valuable fibers grown within its bolls. Until the late eighteenth century, North American cotton was a high-value but limited commodity, grown predominantly on the South Carolina Sea Islands and Georgia. Slaves separated lint from seed by hand. This slow, tedious practice ended in 1793 by the invention of the cotton gin. Cheaply manufactured and readily produced by local craftsmen, the cotton gin broke the technical bottleneck to cotton production. Farmers could now cultivate large crops, confident that with the assistance of a gin, slaves could process and clean large volumes of cotton. The introduction of short-staple or upland cotton further expanded the geographic range of

² U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Edition (Washington, DC, 1975), 209. See Beckert, *Empire of Cotton* for a discussion of the role of cotton in the growth and modernization of merchant houses and financial brokerage houses.

³ Ira Berlin et al. *Remembering Slavery: African Americans Talk About Their Personal Experiences of Slavery and Emancipation* (NY: New Press, 1998), xxxi; Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 692, 694. See also Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*.

⁴ Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, 237.

⁵ See also Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *AHR* 109 (2004): 1405–1438.

⁶ “Cotton—Its Improved and True Culture,” *ACP* 1:2 (February 1853): 52. S1.A35, LLMVC.

American cotton. Short-staple varieties could be grown far from the coast and flourished in the upland regions of South Carolina and Georgia in the 1790s, and farmers swiftly recognized the commercial value of the crop and set about establishing a new plantation regime. Slavery and short-staple cotton formed the axis of this plantation revolution and remained central to cotton expansion throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Unlike cane sugar or rice, which required specific environmental conditions for cultivation, cotton was remarkably hardy and could be farmed readily in the Southeast. By 1830, the cotton kingdom extended from southern Virginia through the Mississippi valley, arcing through Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. By midcentury, cotton production stretched westward, with dense pockets of cotton farming embedded in northern Louisiana and southern Texas. Fields of cotton stretched into the distance, shaping life and labor in these plantation districts.

With this in mind, it is important to explore the core agricultural features of cotton. A cultivated cotton plant has a prominent, monopodial main stem with secondary branches that are both monopodial and sympodial. The latter constitute the fruiting branches that contain bolls, a segmented pod containing immature seeds from which cotton fibers grow. Branch length determines the shape of the plant and often falls into a columnar form, a pyramidal form, or an apple tree form. Cotton is not a true annual plant, however, and certain frost-free varieties have adapted to a growing season inclusive of growth, fruit, and maturation. Each leaf has two buds along the axil, which is the angle between the leaf stalk and the stem, and most cotton varieties possess leaves with five well-defined lobes. The plant's flowers open in an outward spiral fashion starting from the base of the main stem. The open flower is large and almost bell shaped. The most conspicuous part of the flower is the corolla, and this ranges from a creamy white to a light yellow cream in upland varieties, while it is a deep yellow color in Sea Island cotton. For upland cotton, the most prevalent variety in the antebellum south, the time from flowering to open boll ranges from 45 to 65 days. By contrast, the boll-developing period is longer in Sea Island cotton.⁷ Three to five weeks after the boll opens, cotton plants are harvested and produce a dense mat of fibers roughly one inch in length. Readily grown across the hot, humid, and mostly subtropical South, cotton remains a remarkably robust crop but it does require a high input of labor. The viability and adaptability of upland cotton ensured good profits and antebellum slaveholders and agricultural journalists were proud of the significance of cotton to the economic advancement of the region. The era of southern produced cotton had arrived, and contemporaries believed that since cotton could only be raised "profitably or advantageously" on southern soil, slaveholding planters possessed a "brighter prospect" than agriculturists in other parts of the nation.⁸

⁷ Harry Brown and Jacob Ware, *Cotton* (NY: McG, 1958), 99–100, 103–104, 106, 115.

⁸ *De Bow's Review* 3 (Jan 1847), 2. <http://name.umd.umich.edu/acg1336.1-03.001>

Unlike staple crops such as wheat, cotton is a plantation crop and requires sustained care and maintenance during the entire growing season, especially during cultivation.⁹ While cotton is labor and time intensive throughout the whole year, it is, however, a relatively unskilled crop and does not demand overly specialized or skilled labor, again in contrast to rice and sugar. Nor did cotton require a particularly gendered division of labor. Men and women, young and old, could learn the cotton regime, and although slaveholders favored prime-aged slaves as their principal workforce, all ages could cultivate cotton, though the endurance of young, strong bodies placed those slaves at an advantage. Slaves accordingly toiled in the fields from sunup to sundown, caring for growing cotton plants, turning the soil, picking, ginning and finally packing the crop for market. Young and prime-aged slaves who had been cotton laborers for years carried out all the backbreaking work of clearing fields, plowing, tilling and planting the crop. The enslaved in the Red River region consequently came into a work regime defined by cotton and “perhaps even more by the necessity of clearing land” during the early years of settlement. Brawn, endurance, and youth were the traits desired by slaveholders who transported or purchased slaves to clear and plant cotton in this region. Clearing and planting cotton required physical strength from slaves, while cotton picking required nimble, dexterous fingers. Though picking did not require the level of task specificity necessary with sugar or rice, it did require stamina in equal parts to manual dexterity.¹⁰ There were some positions—notably the driver—that held more authority among the field hands, but the specificity of skill and diversity of tasks common in sugar were substantially less with cotton. Often, the largest estates required the “occupational specialization and diversification” of workloads, but the overwhelming absence of very large plantations in the Red River region leveled the degree of specialization needed among the enslaved. Cotton remained a relatively simple crop that required little technology, nor heavy investment. Slavery provided the “elastic supply of labor” that allowed the indefinite expansion of plantation agriculture.¹¹

Along the Red River, most holdings were small to mid-sized farms and cotton proved well suited to this range of big and small operations. As in the rest of the cotton south, and with antebellum demand for cotton high, three out of four slaves alive in 1860 worked as field hands and there was an equal makeup of males and females in field gangs. Red River slave demographics uphold that there was a young and prime age majority to the slave population and little, if any, sexual division of labor. Field hands all completed the same tasks and there is scant indication of any delineation between household and field slaves.¹² That cotton was not an overly skilled crop does not detract from the fact that it was “a finicky consumer of labor,”

⁹ Carville Earle, *Geographical Inquiry and American Historical Problems* (Stanford: SUP, 1992), 234.

¹⁰ Miller, “Plantation Labor Organization and Slave life on the Cotton Frontier: The Alabama-Mississippi Black Belt, 1815–1840,” in Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*, 158.

¹¹ Wright, *Political Economy*, 55.

¹² Michael Johnson, “Work, Culture, and the Slave Community: Slave Occupations in the Cotton Belt in 1860,” *LabH* 27.3 (1986): 328, 328, 331; Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, 247.

especially on new ground where it had “a special appetite for the fit and the fertile.”¹³ Slaves were laboring objects belonging to slaveholders who wanted maximum labor output from a populace that could also self-perpetuate.¹⁴ Commodified for their physical and reproductive labor and for their value as currency, the enslaved population represented the potential envisioned by regional slaveholders for continued cotton expansion in this region. As Marx tellingly observed, “where the capitalist outlook prevails, as on American plantations, the entire surplus value [of slave labor] is regarded as profit . . . The price paid for a slave is nothing but the anticipated and capitalized surplus-value or profit to be wrung out of the slave.”¹⁵ Marx could not have been more accurate. A prime aged hand in 1855 would still be able to pick cotton in 1865, ideally alongside their progeny. Thus, though cotton cultivation proved tedious and arduous, it was not sufficiently difficult to render it the exclusive province of men, as skilled labor was in sugar cultivation. In this region, the entire slave population worked the cotton fields to maximize the surplus value or profits accrued from bondage.

Cotton regulated the daily life of slaves and defined the agricultural work cycle undertaken on the plantations. The workday began at four in the morning and with the exception of hurried breaks for breakfast and lunch, slaves toiled until at least dark.¹⁶ The cotton cycle began shortly after January first and stretched throughout the year. During the winter months, when the ground was still hard and frost enclosed the topsoil, slaves felled trees, split logs, hauled and repaired rails, and cleared underbrush and briars from the established fields. They also tended to the barns and, perhaps most importantly for zealous masters, broke new ground. Breaking and plowing ground was very important for Sarah Hunter, who resided full time on her Rapides Parish plantation while her husband served in the Louisiana senate. Left to manage the plantation, she wrote her husband that Mr. Trent, the overseer, “is uneasy about getting so little ploughing done. The fact is, he has not been able to plough more than three days in any week since you left, without killing up the teem, and negroes, which he had judgment enough not to wish to do.”¹⁷ Her concerns echoed the agricultural advice of the day, a vast body of guidance on agricultural practices that was accessible by Red River slaveholders. Regional planters were abreast of agricultural advancements, technology, and new practices, and the language of agricultural preservation was part of the vernacular of market-oriented agriculturalists. However, although discussions about manure, crop rotation, and soil preservation was available and accessible in periodicals like *The American Cotton Planter* and *De Bow's*, there is no record of how prevalent the execution of this advice was in the region. No

¹³ O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 19.

¹⁴ Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*, 20.

¹⁵ Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch, “Capitalists without Capital: The Burden of Slavery and the Impact of Emancipation,” *AH* 62 (1988): 133.

¹⁶ Jennison, *Cultivating Race*, 243. See also, among numerous other monographs, O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; David Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi, 1720–1835* (Jackson: UPM, 2004); Joseph Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism in the Cotton Plantation South: Central Georgia, 1800–80* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1992).

¹⁷ Sarah Hunter to “My dear husband”, January 27, 1847, Hunter (Robert Alexander and Sarah Jane) Letters, Mss. 4072, LLMVC.

records exist of subscriptions to main agricultural periodicals. However, Red River slaveholders were keenly aware of the antebellum marketplace and the unique position of their region within the cotton South, and despite their desire to maximize cotton production, they did not want to deplete the fertility of the soil. As the region moved from frontier with explosive farming to a settled agricultural system, these slaveholders would have been interested in agricultural developments as participants in a matured slave society. Many had moved from plantation districts where soil mining had stripped the land's nutrients and these landowners had first-hand experience of the long-term implications associated with agricultural mismanagement. Perhaps more so than planters on well-drained flat lands, northwest Louisiana planters understood the power of the Red River. They lived in a world in which environmental control and changes translated into ecological mastery. The commitment of these modernizing slaveholders to the control of the Red River for their agricultural benefit highlights that this region was not populated by soil miners, but rather by modern, market-orientated individuals who adapted to the economic context of their age and managed the environment creatively.¹⁸

The popular southern periodical, *American Cotton Planter*, advised that all lands designated for cotton needed to "be broken deep, close and soft" and long enough before the planting to allow rainwater to settle.¹⁹ January and February were months designated to preparing the soil and beds for the upcoming crop and slaveholders like Sarah Hunter were anxious to ensure a bountiful crop. Publications advised laying manure in thick, even layers across the entire field before demarcating cotton rows with a scooter plow. Manure would then be placed in the furrows to a depth of three inches. At the same time, improvement minded periodicals advised planters to plow up cotton stalks so that the beds would have ample time to settle, before opening them in April.²⁰ Maintaining the Red River's soil fertility was important to reform minded planters, as indicated by correspondence from the overseer at Charles Mathews's Chaseland plantation in Rapides Parish, who wanted to refertilize the soil after harvest to ensure continuation of good crops.²¹ Such concerns were commonplace, in part because topsoil was the only fertile soil and it was easily leached during floods. As Steven Stoll observes, all growth occurs within this "layer of black loam just two feet deep." Soil is "the

¹⁸ The debate on soil fertility and soil mining is extensive and long running. It is also linked with the debate on slaveholders being capitalist/modern or non-capitalist/premodern. This debate was begun by Eugene Genovese in *Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (NY: RH, 1965) and then challenged by Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (London: Wildwood, 1974). See also Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (NY: Vintage, 1972) and *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (NY: Vintage, 1969); James Oakes, *The Ruling Race and Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (NY: Norton, 1998); Peter Parish, *Slavery: History and Historians* (NY: HR, 1989); Kenneth Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Anti-bellum South* (NY: Knopf, 1961); Herbert Gutman, *Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time on the Cross* (Urbana: UILP, 1973) and *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (NY: Vintage, 1976); Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (NY: Norton, 1989); Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South and Slavery and American Economic Development*. On ecological control see Morris, *The Big Muddy*; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*. On agricultural practices see Earle, *Geographical Inquiry and American Historical Problems*; Steven Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth: Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America* (NY: HW, 2002); Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism*.

¹⁹ James Chamber "On the Treatment and Cultivation of Cotton," *ACP* 1:7 (July 1853), 201.

²⁰ "Planting and Cultivating Cotton," *ACP* 1:8 (August 1853), 234–5.

²¹ A.I. Robinson to Charles Mathews, October 30, 1856, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

tablecloth under the banquet of civilization” and the relationship between profitable production and healthy soil preoccupied American agriculture before the twentieth century.²² One of the ways in which antebellum farmers maintained or reinvigorated soil fertility was through manure, and they utilized the output of their livestock to fertilize the fields.

As humid and hot as the temperatures in northern Louisiana (and throughout the South) could become, frost and frozen ground were major concerns during winter months. It was essential that short staple cotton enjoyed a growing season of two hundred frost-free days.²³ As Mrs. Hunter relayed to her husband, “the ground was frozen hard, and the icicles hung on the house for days last week,” which halted essential crop preparations.²⁴ Cold weather also endangered the cotton plant, leaving the seed prone to pathogens and cessation of cellular processes. Fluctuating temperatures also affected growth and development of the plant and could result in poorer quality cotton. Excessive moisture—from flooding, drain run-off, or melted ice—changed the soil salinity and left the plant vulnerable to soil borne diseases, most notably boll rot.²⁵ An 1858 letter from John Houston to his brother-in-law focused on water management. He noted that Red River land tended to overflow when the river rose and all those planters who wished to plant early “throw up a levee from one to three feet high.”²⁶ Flooding water often resulted in a bad crop and a depreciated amount of cotton fit for market. DeSoto parish slaveholder William Sharp chronicled this situation in an 1850 letter. Due to a flood the previous July, his crop was one-third that of the previous year. Sharp wrote that his cotton and corn crop had been destroyed and the Red was again threatening to do further damage.²⁷ Sharp and his contemporaries recognized that soil erosion and flood damage posed a serious problem in cotton planting and these Red River planters strove to preserve the natural fertility of their land. William Dunbar’s system of horizontalizing was one popular method employed, which proved doubly useful to planters because “it reduced loss of valuable topsoil by erosion and it made plowing of hillsides less strenuous for teams of horses and mules.” Hillside ditching was also prevalent in the 1850s, a practice which consisted of laying level, horizontal rows near the apex of the field. Guide rows on either side of the furrow served as governing rows, which created a uniform, inclined plane with orderly rows above and below. The first furrow was plowed on the lower side so that the furrow slice could be turned into the open furrow, a tactic that allowed the dirt to be turned more advantageously. Hillside ditching ensured that alluvial soil was not lost by runoff but was turned into the cultivated furrows. This practice retained soil

²² Stoll, *Larding the Lean Earth*, 14, 17. Stoll notes that it “takes two metric tons (2.2 short tons) to equal just 100 kilograms of the supercharged factory-made fertilizer popular today . . . keeping ninety acres of arable safely in crops required the digestion of forty-five cows (52).”

²³ Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 40.

²⁴ Sarah Hunter to “My dear husband,” January 27, 1847, Hunter (Robert Alexander and Sarah Jane) Letters, Mss. 4072, LLMVC.

²⁵ Wayne Smith and Tom Cothren, eds., *Cotton: Origin, History, Technology, and Production* (NY: Wiley, 1999), 293, 295, 572.

²⁶ John Houston to William Allen, “Dear William,” September 3, 1858, William M. Allen Correspondence, Mss. 2287, 701, LLMVC.

²⁷ William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, May 8, 1850, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC.

fertility and one planter proponent called this technique “a sovereign remedy.”²⁸ On some plantations, the practice of hillside ditching translated into slightly elevated cotton fields that better aerated the cotton shoots. Advice in *De Bow’s* urged planters to raise their cotton ridges and to also temper their excitement for planting to defray premature crops. Such pertinent advice clearly bore fruit for, as Henry Marshall observed, after manuring his cotton fields the resulting crop was so abundant that all the cotton could not be gathered.²⁹ In the 1840s, agricultural innovators introduced drainage ditches to “take off water from horizontal furrows and thus prevent them from overflowing.”³⁰ Drainage and water management systems proved especially important to slaveholders who hoped to benefit by early planting while also instituting recovery measures against a ruined and water-logged crop. Despite the environmental mastery evinced by clearing the Red River Raft for navigable river traffic, water presented a particular challenge, and as Houston and Dunbar discovered, effective plantation management required a careful balance of environmental and soil control.

When the weather began to warm in early spring and the soil dried, the enslaved would again spread fertilizer, in preparation for sowing the crop of cotton alongside corn. Red River slaveholders did not comment profusely on the planting of staple food products except for brief mentions of vegetables and potatoes. Though planters focused on extracting much valuable cotton from their land and slaves, these plantations operated as safety-first holdings and thus grew enough food to remain largely self-sufficient. Along the Red River, as elsewhere in cotton and cane cultivating regions, planters were risk-averse and pragmatic. They raised adequate amounts of corn to feed bondspople and livestock and imported pork and molasses when necessary to supplement the monotonous slave diet.³¹ The winter and early spring work of preparing the ground for planting of cotton was carefully timed because this was a matter of great importance. Breaking up the soil and beating down the old plants were the first steps in planting a new crop. Slaves, both male and female, used a heavy plow pulled by two mules to break up the land. As the previous crop wound down in December, agricultural reformer and publicist James De Bow urged the formation of partially plowed ridges “four or five furrows through together with a leading furrow run first.”³² This method was called ridge husbandry and involved “throwing from four to six furrows toward the center of the old bed” and, in denser

²⁸ R.S. Hardwick, “Hill Side Ditching No 1,” *ACP* 1:1 (January 1853), 14–18, S1.A35, LLMVC; R.S. Hardwick, “Hill Side Ditching No 2,” *ACP* 1:2 (February 1853), 42–43, S1.A35, LLMVC.

²⁹ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, December 3, 1839, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC.

³⁰ John Hebron Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest: Mississippi, 1770–1860* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1988), 32, 33.

³¹ On safety-first food production see Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South and Slavery and Economic Development*; Wright and Howard Kunreuther, “Cotton, Corn and Risk in the Nineteenth Century,” *JEH* 35 (1975): 526–551. On self-sufficiency see Sam Bowers Hillard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake: Food Supply in the Old South, 1840–1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972). See also Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 132–137; Jacob Metzger, “Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations,” *EEH* 12 (1975): 130–132.

³² *De Bow’s Review* 2 (September 1846): 133, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acg1336.1-02.002>; Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 41. For information on agricultural implements see Peter McClelland, *Sowing Modernity: America’s First Agricultural Revolution* (Ithaca: CP, 1997); Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest, 1770–1860*; Chris Evans, “The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650–1850,” *WMQ* 69, no. 1 (January 2012): 71–100.

soil, placing the ridges farther apart at a distance “varying from six to three feet.”³³ Preference with regards to cultivation implements varied throughout the South. In the early years of cotton cultivation, planters preferred the hoe, a tendency that would not always extend to later years, when planters “substituted horse-drawn implements.” This led to the adoption of the scraper, skimmer and sweep; the latter two items greatly economized labor of cultivation because “of the greater width of the furrow covered” in comparison to other plows. These new implements were also particularly well suited to planters in the Red River because they were better adapted to loamy soils and thus were in general use in the alluvial regions of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas.³⁴ Alongside the cotton gin, this new technology would represent the majority of modernizing tools used in the region. Cotton farmers had few incentives to procure numerous innovations or time saving devices. Not only did slaveholders throughout the South suspect that slaves might break these implements, but they eschewed labor saving tools because they had already invested in slave labor. Slave labor negated the need for large-scale technological advancement particularly as most slaveholders preferred to elongate the slaves’ working day, rather than contract it.

As the cotton South expanded, slaveholders began to favor new technology and implements to extract more from the land. The skimmer and sweep were mule-drawn implements that used points and tines of different sizes and at varied angles to disturb the soil in a careful manner that would clean weeds while sparing the crop plants. The initial cultivation phase used the skimmer to clear out old stalks and beat stubble down. Conversely, from May through August the shallow plow of the sweep was utilized because it would not damage the plant’s roots. Another popular new tool was the scraper, which gangs of slaves used to scrape the fields to prevent weeds and grass growing on the sides of the ridges. It also maintained the v-shaped ridges produced by the two folded wings of the middle-busting plow. The plow’s wings pushed the dirt to each side and created a furrow in which to plant seeds.³⁵ On the subject of dropping seed into the open furrows, *De Bow’s* recommended that planters “let one-third more labor than usual be employed (it is but little at most and you are never then in a hurry) and using a small quantity of seed . . . let them be placed in the drill—not spread over the ridge.”³⁶ The publication also urged selectivity when choosing cotton seed, advising the exclusion of “smaller and most imperfect seed” and instead opting for “those most healthy and of stoutest stamina.”³⁷ Indeed, planter preference for cotton seed and slaves followed the same outlines and ideals.

Once the ground was broken, slaves would “list” the ridge in order to raise rows that could be planted with cotton and then beat down the remnants of the prior cotton crop. For

³³ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 700.

³⁴ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 701–2.

³⁵ Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 41.

³⁶ *De Bow’s Review* 2 (September 1846): 134, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/acg1336.1-02.002>

³⁷ *De Bow’s Review* 3 (January 1847): 4. <http://name.umd.umich.edu/acg1336.1-03.001>

example, the plantation journal for Joseph Robinson's plantation Willow Point records the ten-day timeframe during which slaves broke one hundred acres.³⁸ Then, three groups of slaves took on the task of planting the cottonseed. One group would drill into the ground, creating a furrow into which the next group would carefully drop the seed. This usually commenced during the first week of March, as was true on Henry Marston's Ashland plantation.³⁹ Careful hands would place the seeds from fourteen inches to three feet apart. Another group followed behind with their hoes to turn the earth. At Willow Point, located in Red River parish, four gangs completed this process, and these small gangs were the most common work unit on large and small plantations.⁴⁰ Though Red River planters left no record indicating their preference for small sized gangs, they most likely gravitated to smaller units because it prevented loss of control and ensured peak productivity, particularly on the medium sized estates that proliferated along the Red. Planters in this region also seldom possessed the large-scale labor crews common to sugar and rice cultivation and, as scholars since Fogel and Engerman have shown, optimal efficiencies tended to occur in small to medium sized gangs where overseers and drivers could maintain a high and exhausting work pace. Gang labor was a particularly efficient labor system that delivered intense, routinized work. It also enabled planters and their overseers to strictly supervise their slaves' work. Gang labor created work units that labored at the pace of the fastest worker, allowing overseers to directly monitor the gang's progress and to ramp up the pace through targeted punishment.⁴¹ An emphasis was also placed on routine and precision in work quality from laboring slaves.⁴² Thus, from the planters' perspective, independent and disciplined gangs could labor in the focused, efficient manner preferred by these slaveholders. The majority of slaveholders accordingly ordered slaves to plant seed in the ground using the drill and, in the early years of cotton production, "there was a tendency to make more use of the hoe than in later years." In the earlier stages of antebellum cotton production the trend was to plant seed by hand, "three to four bushels to the acre," because thinning the plant was considered less arduous than replanting. As the years progressed, the practice switched to sowing less seed but with greater care to avoid the laborious thinning and cultivation. This made

³⁸ 1854 Plantation Journal, February 10, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

³⁹ 1855, 1856, 1858 Plantation Diaries, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

⁴⁰ 1855 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC. Philip Morgan, "Task and Gang Systems: The Organization of Labor on New World Plantations," in Stephen Innes, ed., *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1988), 200.

⁴¹ For additional discussion of gang labor size and efficiency see Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*; Metzger, "Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Ante-bellum Southern Plantations"; 123–150; Miller, "Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier"; Moore, *Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom*; Peter Coclanis, "How the Low Country was Taken to Task: Slave-Labor Organization in Coastal South Carolina and Georgia," in Robert Paquette and Louis Ferleger, eds., *Slavery, Secession, and Southern History* (Charlottesville: UVAP, 2000); Follett, *The Sugar Masters*, 95–100; Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*.

⁴² Metzger, "Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations."

the work of the slaves both more grueling and extraordinarily precise, as masters and overseers required that the seed be planted carefully in a narrow and very straight fashion.⁴³

After slaves planted the cotton seeds, the care and maintenance of the crop commenced. From mid-February through to June, slaves labored in the field plowing, picking weeds, and skimming. The Willow Point plantation book tabulates the plowing and skimming of the slave gangs, which worked from morning to night “without seasing.”⁴⁴ In midsummer slaveholders tasked their bondspeople with thinning or “chopping” cotton, a laborious process wherein “hoe-wielding slaves” created foot-wide intervals between growing plants, chopped weeds, plowed, and tended the corn and sundry sustenance crops.⁴⁵ The use of a drill in the planting of cotton made it necessary to thin out the rows and the slaves did this by “chopping out.” It proved tedious work that required slaves to “cut through the drill” with hoes and leave cotton plants at a minimal distances of twelve inches.⁴⁶ Moreover, it was delicate work and planters had firm views on the correct way to thin the crop while ensuring maximum production. Following thinning, slaves ran plows through the rows with a “mould board” which threw dirt on the plants. Done in mid-June, moulding freed the plants of grass and weeds and “ensured that only the strongest made it to harvest.”⁴⁷ Finally, late summer and autumn brought the cotton harvest. Some hands continued to pull and stack fodder and tend the corn alongside their work in the cotton fields, but the focus of plantation operations shifted to the demanding and time-consuming work of the harvest. Demands on enslaved labor grew significantly during the harvest and the workdays were oppressive, long, and more taxing. There was, moreover, a significant rush to collect the cotton and prepare it as a saleable product in a compressed period of time, both for financial reasons and to outwit the potentially tempestuous weather of northern Louisiana. During the harvests at Willow Point and Pre Aux Cleres, two Red River plantations, hands consistently picked approximately the same weight each day while one or two slaves manned the gin stand. It was customary practice to pick the field three times with each round of picking designated successively as bottom, middle, and top crops. The middle picking “furnished the largest product, and usually the best quality.”⁴⁸ With the exception of a scant group of slaves tasked with household duties on larger holdings or those who manned the gin, the entire slave workforce of the Red River plantations entered the fields to pick cotton. Some large slaveholders like Henry Marston brought slaves from another of their holdings to help pick the crop. Marston transported ten slaves from his Clinton, East Feliciana Parish holding to

⁴³ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 701; Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 157. For an investigation about the innovation, changes, and customization to the plantation hoe brought about by the demands of cotton cultivation see Evans, “The Plantation Hoe: The Rise and Fall of an Atlantic Commodity, 1650–1850.”

⁴⁴ 1854 Plantation Journal, March 26, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁴⁵ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 30.

⁴⁶ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 702.

⁴⁷ Libby, *Slavery and Frontier Mississippi*, 42.

⁴⁸ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 702.

Ashland, his plantation on Red River, in 1858 to help with planting and picking.⁴⁹ Picking slaves carried a voluminous sack tied about the waist into which they placed the cotton. Once full, overseers or drivers weighed the sack—those individuals who did not meet the required poundage were whipped as punishment—before emptying the contents into a basket. Each hand had a set amount of cotton to pick, and these targets often reached at least two hundred pounds a day. After each slave's cotton picking was weighed and recorded, the gathered cotton dried out on temporary scaffolds in a large barn before being transported to the gin house. This practice allowed the cotton fibers “to “sweat” for a few days before ginning.”⁵⁰ Then, the cotton was ginned, pressed, and formed into giant bales to send down the Red River to the large cotton warehouses in New Orleans. There, wrapped in a protective covering of woven cotton, unsold cotton entered the marketplace.

The crop abundance Henry Marshall experienced led to a surge in settlement and also diversification of seed varieties. When the price of cotton fluctuated in the 1840s, planters strove to increase their output of cotton “to the maximum that their slaves could harvest” while also harvesting an improved grade of product.⁵¹ Experimenting with new varieties and hybrid seeds provided planters with improved types of cotton and offered a measure of security with regard to profits for worried planters. Louisiana varietal cotton was prized in the marketplace and its quality rendered it “next to the Sea Island” among “the most valuable in the market.”⁵² The “Louisiana” referred to the type of cotton grown in Louisiana, which was a variety known as Creole Black Seed, but it can also refer to a crossbreed Creole-Mexican-Petit Gulf hybrid, that was developed by plant breeders to permit adaptation of Mexican cotton plants to different growing conditions. Though the region's cultivators did not explicitly indicate what seed varietal was used, it is highly likely that it was Creole-Mexican-Petit Gulf hybrid. The Mexican hybrid was the first cotton varietal crossbreed created in the early 1800s in response to the demand for an improved upland variety. Creole Black Seed cotton was “imported to Louisiana from Siam by the French during the 1730s” and possessed a large stalk, long white fiber, and large smooth black seeds. Unlike the Sea Island varietal, the Creole was an “annual that was always killed by the first heavy frost” but the lint it produced was very good quality.⁵³ The Mexican hybrid cotton boasted a longer staple and higher lint quality than the Creole or Green Seed varieties. More importantly, “it possessed exceptional picking properties” brought about by the wide opening of its four or five section bolls, allowing for the lint to be “plucked from the pod more easily than any other known variety of the staple.” Hands could pick three to four times as much of this variety than of others, which overshadowed the key drawback:

⁴⁹ 1858 Plantation Diary, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

⁵⁰ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 703.

⁵¹ Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*, 27.

⁵² *De Bow's Review* 1 (April 1846): 320, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/acg1336.1-01.004>

⁵³ John Hebron Moore, “Cotton Breeding in the Old South,” *AH* 30 (July 1956): 95–6. On upland varieties, see also *Southern Agriculturists* 7 (1834), 22 and *Southern Cultivator* 3 (1845), 100. See also *De Bow's Review* 1 (April 1846): 303, where the author asserts that the varietal was derived of Sea Island grown during the Revolutionary period and intermixed with other varieties.

uncomplicated access to the lint also meant it easily fell to the ground or was swept away by wind. Antebellum agronomists continued to refine the Petit Gulf varietal, resulting in modifications that “boasted large bolls, wooly white seeds, good picking characteristics and the immunity to rot.”⁵⁴ As agricultural historians Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode indicate, biological innovations and the continued investment in engineering the ideal cotton varietal led to a forty-nine percent higher picking rate in the South by 1862.⁵⁵ Various cotton plant diseases also plagued the fortune of plantations and informed planters’ selection of the new varietals. The diseases popularly called “rust” and “blight” were very serious and could readily destroy the crop. Of all the insect enemies dreaded by the cotton planter, the cotton caterpillar—colloquially called the “army worm”—remained the most dreaded. Experiments were conducted to find the sturdiest varieties of cotton, resulting in engineered varieties that “had longer staple . . . greater freedom from disease, large bolls, numerous bolls, or high yield per acre.”⁵⁶ This variety, Petit Gulf, particularly suited the region’s improvement-minded slaveholders. Easiest to pick, it was adapted to the dexterity of human hands and helped maximize slave labor while diminishing the need for expensive, additional technological innovations. Petit Gulf grew prolifically in a variety of soils and climates, bloomed two weeks earlier than any other strain and allowed for elongation of the picking season, and possessed immunity to rot. As a variety it also produced long, fine cotton fibers that made it desirable and exceptionally marketable.⁵⁷ The drive to create an ideal varietal that maximized outputs and protected against profit loss from disease highlights the significance of cotton to the antebellum marketplace and to pragmatic, improvement-orientated southern cultivators.

Planter success depended on good quality cotton and they remained anxious about the outcome of the yearly crop. Successful and profitable crops triggered boasting and planters were unabashed in their enthusiasm. After harvesting began on the 1855 Chaseland crop, Charles Mathews’ overseer wrote that the “cotton is very fine inded the crop on the uper place is said to be the best in the cuntry.”⁵⁸ In 1854, Willow Point’s overseer charted the weight of all 263 bales of cotton, each of which weighed between 320 and 480 pounds. The following year, the cotton bales at Willow Point swelled and produced less bottom grade, or trashy, cotton.⁵⁹ At Pre Aux Cleres, in Natchitoches Parish, slaves gathered “37000 seed cotton” for the 1852 harvest that they ginned into “275 bales of 400 lb each of 110000 lint.”⁶⁰ A letter from George

⁵⁴ Moore, “Cotton Breeding in the Old South,” 97. This development of crossbreed cotton varietals suited to the different climates and soils of the South’s cotton producing regions is a textured story. For a more recent account see, Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, ““Wait a Cotton Pickin’ Minute!”: A New View of Slave Productivity,” http://www.history.upenn.edu/economichistoryforum/docs/olmstead_07.pdf

⁵⁵ Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode, “Biological Innovation and Productivity Growth in the Antebellum Cotton Economy,” NBER Working Paper 14142: 28. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w14142>. Pages 22–28 contain a discussion of why picking rates increased.

⁵⁶ Gray, *History of Agriculture*, 703–4.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*. 152, 154.

⁵⁸ A.I. Robinson to Charles Mathews, June 14, 1855, Charles L. Mathews Family Papers, Mss. 910, LLMVC.

⁵⁹ 1855 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁶⁰ 1852 Plantation Journal, Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, Mss. 684, LLMVC. For insight on relative output see Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*; Caitlin Rosenthal, “From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in America, 1750–1880,”

Mason Graham, a prominent Rapides Parish slaveholder and influential figure in antebellum Louisiana, similarly indicated his exuberance at the prospect of a good crop. He wrote his sister in October 1848 as harvest was in full swing, and reflected on his imminent change in prospects. Previous years had netted disappointing results that had left Graham hesitant about his cotton crop. All that changed, however, with the news of a bumper harvest. He wrote that the 1848 crop was “very heavy one of corn, having gathered 100 bushels to the acre . . . I am picking over 10,000 wt of cotton a day.” Like other planters who harvested major crops, he was finally pleased with the outcome of his crop, and declared he had “less annoyance with my plantation this year than I have ever had before.”⁶¹ For slaves, good crop or bad, each new year meant a continuation of long, oppressive hours in the field, picking from can see to can’t, punctuated by violence and the constant commodification by slaveholders of their labor.

The agricultural and laboring regime of the Red River region molded the contours of enslavement and shaped the everyday of the region’s slaves. Here, cotton was king and cotton also defined business success. The rich soil and planter’s maximization of land and labor served as a route to economic success that at least two generations of Red River planters followed. Silas Flournoy captured these sentiments in an 1838 letter to his wife in Tennessee. Very pleased with his Pleasant Point, Caddo Parish crop he wrote, “as to making money, there can be no doubt about it. Nothing is wanting but a start and then a little perseverance and farming here is a sure road to a fortune.”⁶² In truth, it was the unceasing toil of Flournoy’s slaves in the cotton field that paved the road to fortune for him and other slaveholders. The little perseverance that Flournoy referenced in his letter bore scant resemblance to the lives of the slaves who toiled as laboring objects on his plantation and on other estates throughout the region. Crop success proved a determinative influence in almost every aspect of plantation life. It impacted the quality of slave life in the coming year, the procurement of more land, more hands, and the purchase of clothing. It also determined the quantity of foodstuffs grown on the plantation, external purchases, and hiring out slaves. The success or failure of a crop comprised the total factor productivity—or the ratio of the value of output to a weighted average of inputs such as land, labor, and capital—of the plantation for that financial year.⁶³ Each year, the outcome of this ratio determined the movement of resources from output to inputs and whether slaveholders

Enterprise & Society 14 (2013): 732–748; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*; Morris, “Articulation of Two Worlds”; Wright, “Slavery and the Cotton Boom,” *EEH* 12 (1975): 439–451.

⁶¹ George Mason Graham to Mrs. E.A.C. Mason, October 6, 1848, George Mason Graham Letters, Mss. 163, LLMVC.

⁶² Silas Flournoy to Elizabeth Flournoy, “My dear Elizabeth,” April 11, 1838, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC.

⁶³ Wright, *Slavery and Economic Development*, 94. For discussion on southern planters and political economy see the titles in footnote 183. On markets, capital, and expansion see also Joyce Appleby, “The Vexed Story of Capitalism Told by American Historians,” *JER* 21 (2001): 1–18; Douglas Egerton, “Markets without a Market Revolution,” *JER* 16, (1996): 207–221; David Davis, “Looking at Slavery from Broader Perspective,” *AHR* 105 (2000): 452–466; Wright, “Slavery and the Cotton Boom”; Ransom and Sutch, “Capitalists without Capital”; Metzger, “Rational Management, Modern Business Practices, and Economies of Scale in the Ante-Bellum Southern Plantations”; Miller, *South by Southwest*; Morris, *Becoming Southern*; Jennison, *Cultivating Race*; Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier*; Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism*; Rothman, *Slave Country*; Rothman, *Flush Times and Fever Dreams*. For analysis and overview of the slavery debates see Kolchin, *American Slavery*; Parish, *Slavery*; Fogel, *The Slavery Debates*; Mark Smith, *Debating Slavery: Economy and Society in the Antebellum American South* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998). For an up-to-date overview see Kaye, “The Second Slavery.”

would dole out items that could visibly alter slave life. Market-centric, northwestern Louisiana's slaveholders would not spend plantation resources unless it was a good business decision. Thus, cotton defined plantation and slave life; it shaped the labor system, dictated labor supply, and sharply influenced the cadence of rural life on the Red River.

It is quite important to state clearly and explicitly that the records available do not provide a vastly rich cache of information on slave life or on slaveholders. Slaveholders and their families left behind documentation on the importance and centrality of successful cotton crops to their livelihood but they did not leave much about their daily lives and much less about their slaves. What mattered in the Red River was the cotton economy, not detailed discussions over the ethics of slavery. There was no evidence of paternalism at all. Instead slavery was cold and detached, and slaves were distilled into numbers. Making the land productive was the central focus, and planters used their commitment to slavery as an economic and racial system to distill slaves into simplified objects that could maximize profit. In this non-paternalistic and emotionally bleak plantation world, slaves were perceived of as assets and as essential productive resources within the slave system. In their writings and business dealings, slaveholders reduced their bondpeople into instruments of labor. As such, there was no need to maintain detailed records about the daily humdrum of their objects.⁶⁴ The inconvenient death of a prime hand or the birth of new property might be notated on holdings where the master had the predilection toward record keeping. But beyond a line in a ledger, little attention was afforded to slave life. Perhaps such inattention derived from the absence of time and leisure. As the demographic data indicated, many of the region's slaveholders resided on small to mid-sized holdings. They worked alongside their slaves, leaving little time to record plantation activities. However, it is of equal importance that slaveholders along the Red appear to have exhibited little interest in the lives of those they purchased. In their private and business papers, the region's slaveholders left a dearth of information with many aspects of the slave experience reduced to marginal notes in a ledger or asides in correspondence through which the historian must reconstruct the world of the Red River slave.

Slaves were seen as units of production throughout the South, however, in this region, the goal of reaping maximum cotton from the land defined the life of the enslaved with cotton picking often dragging into the new year. Cotton, moreover, required year-round attention with "cold morning baths of cotton picking which often lasted from August to February."⁶⁵ Red River slaves labored in a self-contained system where masters dictated the degree and severity of work. When bad weather or disease affected a crop, planters could extend work hours to save the current crop or alter work patterns, volume and kind of cotton grown, and laboring hours for

⁶⁴ There are only two regional plantations—Pre Aux Cleres and Willow Point—whose ledgers are at LLMVC. The ledgers span a few years but are not continuous. George Marshall's daybook provides limited additional information.

⁶⁵ Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 53. Though there is evidence that there were some slaves experienced in both crops, but who preferred sugar, the sugar region was a crushing place to be a slave. Apart from the rice islands, it was the only region in the U.S. South where adult mortality rates were exceptionally high. For discussion of slavery and sugar see Follett, *The Sugar Masters*.

the upcoming crop. For slaveholders, chattel bondage provided a flexible labor system that met the various demands of the cotton regime; malleability was a significant tool in the slaveholding arsenal, and it allowed planters to stretch the labor of their chattel for economic benefit.⁶⁶ As Gavin Wright and Carville Earle have shown, slavery as a labor model also made sense in a world wherein the staple crop required constant attention and where planters desired maximum financial gain. The “allocative efficiency” of slave labor forces found on individual farms throughout the region allowed slaveholders to combine production factors with efficiency in accordance with prices and marginal productivities.⁶⁷ By dint of slave ownership, masters also had the ability to mobilize labor throughout the cultivation and harvesting period. The flexibility of the plantation labor force was particularly useful when planters expanded their crop or had a bumper crop and it influenced the daily life and work patterns of the region’s commodified slaves.

As Dale Tomich has indicated, slavery represented a “generalized form of commodity production effected through specific relations of domination.”⁶⁸ In the Red River region, slaves were the engine and fuel that drove cotton plantations. As instruments of production, slave populations were required to meet the needs of market-driven slaveholders. Throughout the antebellum period, planters shaped their slave population to fulfill the demands for more cotton and evermore-nimble hands. When Red River planters did expand their operations, they purchased land and additional slaves. Risk averse planters who did purchase oftentimes bought young slaves. The expanding frontier favored prime hands that could clear the land quickly, effectively, and endure the harsh work regime. An efficient prime hand could clear approximately one-eighth of an acre per day and would take about four months to clear the twelve acres that they would cultivate as a full hand.⁶⁹ Prime hands could also self-perpetuate; a fertile female slave thus became a cost effective purchase if she produced progeny.

The Red River region had an exceptionally young slave population throughout the antebellum period.⁷⁰ The demographic information from the 1850 and 1860 slave schedules underscore that young slaves were brought into this region and their experience and skills were shaped by the rough tenor of the cotton fields.⁷¹ As in other parts of the slave South where slave populations grew through rapid enforced migration, securing a youthful population proved

⁶⁶ See Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*; Smith, *Debating Slavery*; Parish, *Slavery*; Ransom and Sutch, “Capitalist without Capital.” On the flexibility of the institution to diverse labor requirements see Christopher Morris, “The Articulation of Two Worlds: The Master-Slave Relationship Reconsidered,” *JAH* 85 (1998): 982–1007.

⁶⁷ Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South*, 87. On slavery as ideal for southern approach to staple crops see also Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*; Earle, *Geographical Inquiry and American Historical Problems*; Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*.

⁶⁸ Dale Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 3.

⁶⁹ Berlin and Morgan, eds., *Cultivation and Culture*, 5. Miller, “Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier,” 158. See also Reidy, *From Slavery to Agrarian Capitalism*.

⁷⁰ On the strong preference for youth in the New Orleans slave market and among frontier slaveholders, see Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: UWP, 1989); Deyle, *Carry Me Back*; Follett, *The Sugar Masters*. On height and age of prime hands see Jonathan Pritchett and Herman Freudenberger, “A Peculiar Sample: The Selection of Slaves for the New Orleans Market,” *JEH* 52 (1992): 109–127; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*.

⁷¹ For demographic details and charts, see chapter one, figures 10–12.

essential to plantation success. The miniscule numbers of elderly slaves may very well have been survivors from the first waves of frontier settlement and those that managed to endure the regime. Most of the surviving plantation journals for Pre Aux Cleres Plantation and Willow Point Plantation list the names of slaves and the amount of cotton picked. Their ages and family connections are not recorded. For instance, the 1859 journal at Willow Point noted that of the estate's 74 slaves, only five are over the age of 45, with the eldest aged 56. Two of those 45+ slaves were female and the remainder male. The following year, Veronique, the eldest slave no longer appeared in the plantation ledger.⁷² Though sparse information remains in plantation ledgers about the work of elderly slaves like Veronique, most labored in the fields, as old Abram did alongside Solomon Northup on Epps's plantation south of Alexandria.⁷³ Occasionally elderly slaves were assigned household work and many older slave women provided childcare for slave children, cooked, and produced slave clothing.⁷⁴ Some elderly bondswomen were also responsible for the master's children. Ellison Adger, whose family settled in Bossier in 1846, wrote about Ma Jane and her care for the Adger children in his memoirs. Allegedly 102 at the time of her death, Ma Jane was an exceptional woman. She served the family in the field and house in her youth and then raised her master's white progeny. She served and reared five generations of Adgers.⁷⁵

Morbidity and mortality rates also shaped the character of the slave population. Numerous diseases plagued the health of Southerners and infectious epidemics contributed to mortality rates.⁷⁶ Blacks and whites residing in humid, low-lying, swampy regions such as Louisiana were in perpetual fear of yellow fever and malaria.⁷⁷ Nineteenth century people lived with many forms of "the fever," however epidemic yellow fever was seen by most Americans as "a Southern disease entirely."⁷⁸ Malaria was often lumped together with yellow fever and typhus under the vague rubric of "remittent" fevers. The lack of distinction and treatment protocols ensured high fatalities throughout the South.⁷⁹ Immunity was highly coveted. Those who made it through a yellow fever epidemic or survived a childhood bout of the disease were 'seasoned.' Hubbard Bosley of Telegram Plantation in Bossier received a letter from a friend in

⁷² 1859 Plantation Journal and 1860 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁷³ Sue Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup: Twelve Years a Slave* (Longboat Key: Telemachus Press, 2013), 109.

⁷⁴ Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (NY: Norton, 1985), 53. See also Ann Malone, "Searching for the Family and Household Structure of Rural Louisiana, 1810–1864," *LH* 28 (1987): 357–379; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*, 55.

⁷⁵ Memoirs of Ellison Moultrie Adger, Mrs. Mary Moultrie Adger Family and Plantation Records, Collection 093, LSUS.

⁷⁶ Cholera epidemics were prevalent in the South throughout the 1830s and 1840s and the South was particularly impacted in 1833. See Richard Steckel, "Slave Mortality: Analysis of Evidence from Plantation Records," *SSH* 3 (1979): 86–113. Major antebellum yellow fever epidemics occurred in New Orleans and Louisiana in 1833 and 1853. See also Paul Jacobson, "An Estimate of the Expectation of Life in the United States in 1850," *The Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (April 1957): 197–201.

⁷⁷ Work on the impact and shaping of the South by malaria and yellow fever is abundant. See Todd Savitt, *Disease and Distinctiveness in the American South* (Knoxville: UTNP, 1988); Todd Savitt, *Medicine and Slavery: The Diseases and Health Care of Blacks in Antebellum Virginia* (Urbana: UIP, 1978); Steven Stowe, *Doctoring the South: Southern Physicians and Everyday Medicine in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2004); Jo Ann Carrigan, "Privilege, Prejudice, and the Strangers' Disease in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *JSH* 36 (1970): 568–578; H. Roy Merrens and George Terry, "Dying in Paradise: Malaria, Mortality, and the Perceptual Environment in Colonial South Carolina," *JSH* 50 (1984): 533–550.

⁷⁸ Stowe, *Doctoring the South*, 5.

⁷⁹ Kenneth Kiple and Virginia Himmelsteib King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora: Diet, Disease and Racism* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981), 50. See also Steckel, "Slave Morality" and "A Dreadful Childhood"; Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract*.

Pleasant Hill describing the dreaded “Louisiana chills” that had rendered himself as well as his sister “dangerously sick” for two weeks.⁸⁰ Whether by genetic predisposition or acquired, slaveholders especially prized immunity.⁸¹ In addition to the health hazards presented by the Louisiana climate, slaves and their children acquired a bevy of other diseases. Slave suffered from a high incidence of tetanus, rheumatism, pneumonia, cholera, and eye complaints including partial and total blindness. Poor diet led to anemia, calcium, magnesium, and or iron deficiencies. Mary Sibley lived at Mount Elon Plantation in Alexandria and corresponded regularly with her daughter whose plantation was outside Shreveport. In May 1855, cholera broke out near Mount Elon “among the lower class, and negroes badly fed.” The town’s cisterns were entirely exhausted, forcing inhabitants to pay “two dollars a barrel for water from across the river.” Doctor Sullivan, a nearby neighbor, “lost three negroes with cholera” all of whom “lived entirely on fresh fish and drink river waters.”⁸² Slaveholders in this region, like many of their counterparts across the South, took note of slave health and utilized similar descriptive terms for addressing slave health as when discussing the weather.⁸³ Just as storms rolled in, so too did illness, leaving a trail of death in its wake. Most often slaveholders only found aberrant events or the death of a particularly productive slave noteworthy. Mary Sibley noted the cholera outbreak precisely because it would impact the rhythms of daily plantation life and the labor required for cotton growth for those plantations along the Red affected by the epidemic. Sibley and her slaveholding contemporaries reduced slave deaths to inconveniences with economic impact overshadowing human loss.

One of the most distinctive features of North American slavery was the strong, positive, natural increase of the slave population.⁸⁴ Indeed, master and slave understood that within the slave system a significant value was placed on the capacity of adult female slaves to reproduce the labor force, with a high premium placed on fecund females.⁸⁵ The ability to bear children raised the appraisal price of female slaves in Southwestern slave markets. Young women would often fetch \$90 more in Louisiana than in the Upper South. The precise value of potential childbearing is difficult to quantify but slaveholders themselves calculated that at least 5 or 6 percent of their profit would result from slave progeny. In fact, as the price of prime male hands rose, women proved relatively better value for money in certain slave economies, notably

⁸⁰ William Waglaz to Hubbard Bosley, June 10, 1854, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Telegraph Plantation is in present day Red River Parish, which was part of Bossier during the antebellum. Pleasant Hill is outside of Shreveport. On seasoning see Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2002).

⁸¹ Many slaves, particularly of West African origin, enjoyed a degree of genetic immunity to malaria due to a lack of Duffy antigens. Many others had additional protection from two genetic hemoglobin conditions: sickle-cell disease and sickle-cell trait. Those with the former usually died young but the latter lived normal lives, with added protection against malaria, and passed the sickling gene to their progeny. Slaveholders did not know this and assumed that this made slave predisposed to laboring.

⁸² Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, May 31, 1855, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

⁸³ Stowe, *Doctoring the South*, 117.

⁸⁴ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 2.

⁸⁵ Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750–1925* (NY: Vintage, 1976), 75. See also John Campell, “Work, Pregnancy, and Infant Mortality among Southern Slaves,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 14, no. 4 (Spring 1984): 793–812.

sugar.⁸⁶ Red River planters do not appear to have devoted diary or ledger space to notating the value added by the reproductive potential of their chattel but natural increase hugely benefited slaveholders across the region. The significance of births, however, could not mask slaveholders' dismissive behavior about death. As the example of one Red River estate indicates, both birth and death continued to punctuate the lives of the enslaved. Like other estates where a young and fertile population resided, Willow Point Plantation had 18 women of childbearing age in 1859. There were ten children aged five and under, seven children between the ages of six and ten, and four adolescents aged eleven to fifteen. The 1859 child population had grown from a total of ten (no discernment made to age) in 1856.⁸⁷ Slave children, nevertheless, died at high rates from the nine-day fits and had fatal difficulties with teething. Worms, diphtheria, and whooping cough also killed many infants and likely caused child morbidity on Willow Point and throughout the region. The nutritional deficiencies of slave mothers also had repercussions for their offspring. Slave babies were nutritionally deficient when weaned and then introduced to a diet even higher in carbohydrates and lower in protein than slave adults, which led to a very anemic and mineral deficient slave child population. Slave child populations experienced both growth depression and recovery and the "unusual patterns of physical growth" suggests that most planters managed the health and nutritional intake of slave children.⁸⁸ As the demographics for the Red River region demonstrate, the nine and under age group remained a perilous group, exposed to a host of mortal infections. Black children died from convulsions, teething, tetanus, lockjaw, suffocation, and worms at more than four times the rate of white children.⁸⁹ Rickets posed a significant problem for children and was a persistent issue for female slaves who suffered from deformed and small pelvises as a result. In addition to health issues stemming from pregnancy, pregnant slave women continued to toil in the field without alteration in type or reduction in amount of work. Approximately eighty percent of slave women labored in the fields and the highest numbers of stillbirths tended to be in November or December. This is consistent with continued hard work and an overall net nutritional deprivation during the preparation and planting season.⁹⁰ There was no increase in food for pregnant or nursing mothers and natal care was non-existent. Motherhood, moreover, continued to structure the female slave work experience. Older women might serve as nurses and provide childcare, but mothers with infant children had to care for them while meeting

⁸⁶ Follett, *Sugar Masters*, 60–64.

⁸⁷ 1856 Plantation Journal and 1859 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁸⁸ Richard Steckel, "Fluctuations in a Dreadful Childhood: Synthetic Longitudinal Height Data, Relative Prices and Weather in the Short-Term Health of American Slaves," NBER working paper no. 10993: 5. <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10993>. See also Steckel, "Birth Weights and Infant Mortality among American Slaves," *EEH* 23 (1986): 173–198.

⁸⁹ Kiple and King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora*, 77, 97, 98, 100; Steckel, "Slave Morality," "A Dreadful Childhood," and "A Peculiar Population: The Nutrition, Health, and Mortality of American Slaves from Childhood to Maturity," *JEH* 46 (1986): 721–741.

⁹⁰ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 39; Richard Steckel, "Women, Work, and Health Under Plantation Slavery in the United States," in David Gaspar and Darlene Hine, eds., *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas* (Bloomington: IUP, 1996), 55–56. See also Morris, *Becoming Southern*; Leslie Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: UILP, 1997); William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (NY: OUP, 1996). For discussion of fecundity as a component of articulation see Morris, "Articulation of Two Worlds."

picking requirements in the field. In numerous other southern locations where slaveholders sought to promote population growth, nursing women received extra rations to supplement their poor diets or they feigned illness in order to gain a respite from their work or to change the nature of their labor.⁹¹ In the Red River region, by contrast, accommodations to work and diet were conspicuous by their absence. Feigning illness, often noted with irritation in the planter's diaries in other regions, does not appear from the historical record to have been an oft-used method in this region, and pregnant or nursing, women labored in the field.

Once old enough to pick cotton, children entered the cotton fields to work alongside the plantation's slave force. Entering the field represented a clear departure from childhood. As children, slaves might have been spared from fieldwork, as Polly Mason was on her owner's Alexandria plantation.⁹² On the whole, however, young slaves tended to do the same work as their parents and they would do this same work their whole life.⁹³ Unlike East Coast plantations or in more gentrified regions of the Deep South, there is no evidence to support that there was any differentiation in the work undertaken by the region's slave workforce. With the majority of holdings small to mid-sized, planters could not afford to establish discrete gangs for slave children. By contrast, on most regional estates, slaves worked without particular distinctions made to age or skill. The 1854 Willow Point plantation book lists the slaves' occupations. In addition to twenty-seven field hands and five children, the plantation had a blacksmith, hogwinder, carpenter, teamster, cook, ferryman, and two gin drivers.⁹⁴ However, since the plantation manager did not elucidate if specialized laborers also worked the cotton fields, and there is no similarly detailed list for the prior or following years, no firm conclusion can be made about rigid distinctions in specialization. Since very few slaves were ascribed solely to household work and only the very largest of plantations in Red River would have had distinct classes of slaves working as skilled craftsmen, in the house or the field, it is likely that during peak harvest all of the Willow Point slaves picked cotton. Thus, most young or recently relocated slaves would have little opportunity for any work apart from in the fields. Red River slaveholders put little premium on slaves' learning skills and they adopted gang labor as the preferred method of organizing production.⁹⁵ Some plantations, such as Henry Marshall's Land's End, Henry Marston's Ashland, and Willow Point utilized overseers but scant documentation remains about whether black drivers—popular in other sections of the South—were used as part of the gang labor structure. Willow Point's plantation book lists a black overseer and driver in 1854 but no further information about this role or its duration at the

⁹¹ White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 75, 79. For pregnancy and neonatal work patterns as well as infant mortality rates see Steckel, "A Dreadful Childhood."

⁹² Johnson, "Work, Culture, and the Slave Community," 349; Polly Mason Oral Interview, Mss. 4700.0041, LLMVC. Polly Mason did not know her age and her interviewer stated—with no proof—that she spent the first ten years of her life a slave. In his working paper, Steckel notes that slave children were less prone to disease at around age 10, which corresponds with beginning work in the fields and a less restricted caloric intake. Steckel, "Fluctuations in a Dreadful Childhood."

⁹³ Johnson, "Work, Culture, and the Slave Community," 339.

⁹⁴ 1854 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁹⁵ Reidy, "Obligation and Right," 142, 149. See also Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 93–133.

plantation.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, overseers clearly dragooned slave labor, even if the relatively modest size of operations in northern Louisiana precluded the need for drivers.

While visiting the Red River plantations, Olmsted observed that each overseer regulated the hours of work for the gangs under their supervision. Slaves were “at work before sunrise and after sunset” and the lengths of all breaks were at the discretion of the overseer or drivers.⁹⁷ Gang labor—as opposed to task—was particularly suited to the extractive and exploitative culture of the Red River. Task labor allowed for a modicum of independence in a slave’s daily work life because it allowed them to set the pace of their work. Unlike gang labor, tasking established a clear division of labor time and encouraged slaves to grow their own supplemental food once their daily task was completed.⁹⁸ The task system was not used on Red River. Instead, gang labor proliferated, which enabled planters and overseers better control of the workforce and productivity. Willow Point utilized four gangs and Pre Aux Cleres had five gangs, with no delineation of skill levels.⁹⁹ George Marshall of Rapides Parish divided the one hundred and two slaves on his Crescent Plantation into twenty-one families in his one record of them but did not specify if these families also constituted discrete units of production. The plantation diary lists twenty-four male hands and twenty female hands along with their many progeny.¹⁰⁰ Slaveholders broke each gang into full hands, half hands, and quarter hands. Overseers and slaveholders employed these terms to delineate the amount of work expected from each individual and to keep track of individual productivity. There was little sexual division of labor among field hands and the census indicates that in this region male and female slave populations were relatively equal. All field laborers were given the same tasks and consistently required to pick the same weight of cotton during harvest, with slaves beaten if they did not collect their daily quota. Solomon Northup recalled that on the first picking day in the field, slaves were “whipped up smartly” and then made to “pick as fast as he can possibly.” When the cotton was weighed at night, the slaves’ “capability in cotton picking is known” and were then required to bring in the same amount subsequently.¹⁰¹ Failure to consistently meet this set individual picking quantity was met with punishment.

For some slaves, fieldwork comprised most, but not all of their labors. Most plantations tasked one male with the job of ginner, which became their full-time chore once picking was in

⁹⁶ Henry Marshall to Maria Marshall, February 18, 1839, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC; Henry Marston 1856 Diary, September 28; November 16, 1856, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC; 1854 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

⁹⁷ Charles Beveridge and Charles Capen McLaughlin, eds., *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted. Volume Two: Slavery and the South, 1852–1857* (Baltimore: JHUP, 1981), 218.

⁹⁸ Anthony Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2007), 103. On tasking, see Berlin and Morgan, eds, *Cultivation and Culture*; Dusiinberre, *Them Dark Days*; Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: UILP, 1984); Innes ed., *Work and Labor in Early America*; Betty Wood, *Women’s Work, Men’s Work: The Informal Slave Economies of Lowcountry Georgia* (Athens: UGA, 1995).

⁹⁹ 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1860 Plantation Journals, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC; 1852 and 1853 Plantation Journals, Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, Mss. 684, LLMVC. In many other parts of the South gangs would be distinguished as first, second, third, etc. On the differentiation of labor gangs see Miller, “Plantation Labor Organization and Slave Life on the Cotton Frontier”; Moore, *The Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom in the Old Southwest*.

¹⁰⁰ 1854–1881 Daybook, George B. Marshall Family Papers, Mss. 969, LLMVC.

¹⁰¹ Eakin, *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 96.

full swing. York served as ginner at Willow Point alongside Morer, the driver. At Pre Aux Cleres, Jeff was ginner and Bazell was wagoner. While ginner pressed bales, all other hands picked cotton, as was the case during the 1856 harvest at Marston's Ashland plantation.¹⁰² Occasionally, large estates such as Willow Point show greater task delineation and more complex slave structures. In addition to York and Morer, Harkins worked as a teamster and Hardy served as carpenter and corn minder. Two females predominantly worked as house slaves, following a pattern that occurred on larger plantations in the region, such as Ulster Plantation, where Polly Mason only toiled as a house slave. At Willow Point, Francoise was both cook and gardener in addition to her fieldwork while Cherry—who would be hired out in 1859—doubled as house servant. Other slaves such as Henry and Charlotte assumed additional tasks alongside their field duties. In both cases they cared for the plantation livestock, feeding the hogs and milking the cows at early light and at the close of the day. During the cultivation period, many female and child slaves were also sent into the house to perform various chores, conduct maintenance, and to make clothes. Other hands, usually male, chopped wood and repaired fences and buildings, although the plantation's 1859 journal notes that female hands had been reinforcing the irrigation structures by "leaving basin bayou" from mid-February through early March.¹⁰³ However, come harvest, the majority of hands on plantations of all sizes throughout the region would be sent to the fields to attend to the white gold.

Whether reduced to common chattel on most Red River estates or assigned particular tasks on Willow Point, bondspeople faced the ignominy of being denied an individualized name. Herbert Gutman demonstrated the socio-anthropological significance of slave naming practices in the established plantation zones. His work illustrates that on large-scale, densely populated cotton and rice holdings of the seaboard states, naming practices connected kin, indicated kin obligation and enshrined family history. Names "enlarged slave social obligation" and carried deep-rooted significance.¹⁰⁴ As was true in other areas of slave life, bondspeople had little say over the official names for their children. Names, however, connoted personality and on the Red River, planters reduced individuals to property. Slaves on Red River were objects with a price.¹⁰⁵ The historic record is silent as to whether the Red River region possessed a slave culture with a semblance of identity or allowed slaves to maintain a connection to kith and kin. Here, slaves were interchangeable laboring commodities. Indeed, as Olmsted noted during his visit to the Calhoun plantation on the site of present day Colfax, "each laborer is such an inconsiderable unit in the mass of laborers, that he may even not be known by name, or

¹⁰² 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1860 Plantation Journals, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC; 1852 and 1853 Plantation Journals, Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, Mss. 684, LLMVC; Henry Marston 1856 Diary, September 17, 1856, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

¹⁰³ 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1860 Plantation Journals, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁴ Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 185.

¹⁰⁵ Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 231.

personally recognizable by his master.”¹⁰⁶ The repetition of names and usage of adjectives to differentiate between individuals underscores the interchangeable nature and the faceless aspect of slave identity from the planter perspective. Slaves were distilled into numbers and made invisible, so there was no need to deliberate on names. With scant aural or written testimony from Red River slaves there is little evidence to indicate that the individuals enslaved in this region established naming practices and mores akin to those in other entrenched slave regions. Gutman notes that names bestowed upon children were chosen “for reasons rooted in the developing Afro-American culture,” however the plantation journals indicate that most children in this area were merely listed as infant, a demarcation sometimes made alongside the mother’s name or singularly.¹⁰⁷ Local slave traders, as evidenced earlier by Zack Howell, listed mothers and small children as saleable units. In this lonely plantation world, slaves carried out their lives in a nameless and brutally controlled system, where masters viewed them as interchangeable persons with a price.

Like Solomon Northup, whose birth name was cast aside in favor of a name selected by slave traders, other slaves were most likely given new identities upon their arrival on the Red River. Northup was known by a different forename—Platt—and by the surnames of his three different owners during his twelve-year enslavement along the Red River in central Louisiana.¹⁰⁸ The original identities and names of slaves brought to the Red River by slave trade were largely immaterial to slaveholders. Instead, owners possessed the power of naming and it was used as a means of control and identity loss throughout the slave South. With naming firmly in the hands of slaveholders, slaves were further stripped of any semblance of self-ownership. Available records indicate that slaves born on the region’s plantations were given a name from a restricted list of appropriate monikers. Names were often recycled and bestowed upon multiple individuals. At Willow Point individuals that possessed duplicate names were distinguished by use of their associated number. Henry #1 and Henry #2, for instance, worked alongside John #1, #2 and #3; Joe #1 and Joe #2 toiled next to Eliza #1 and Eliza #2. Two females named Eliza were enslaved at Pre aux Cleres and were referred to as Eliza Georgia—indicative of where she was brought from—and Eliza Strader—descriptive of a past owner. Planter George Marshall preferred descriptive nouns to differentiate between his slaves. His Crescent Plantation was home to Big Joe, Little Joe, Big John, John, Washington, and Big Washington. Most slave monikers were repeated at least twice at Henry Marshall’s Land’s End plantation, and some names as many as four times. He had a particular fondness for the names Lucy, Cuffy, Hester, Eve, Rachel, Ben, Jim, Mary, Jane, Betsey, Lucky, Henry, and

¹⁰⁶ Beveridge and McLaughlin, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 216.

¹⁰⁷ Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 186; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Eakin, *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 72; Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, 253.

Charlotte.¹⁰⁹ The repetition of slave names, frequently applied child-like diminutives, or references to geography or past statesmen, racially marked and demeaned slave individuals. The multiplicity of names reduced individuals and was another manifestation of the replaceable, brutal, and bleak nature of enslavement.

On the slaveholding frontier of northwest Louisiana, identically named slaves were not the only commonly utilized naming practice. Many slaveholders bestowed curious names upon slaves. Sometimes they selected objects, places or occupations as designations, calling their slaves by a wide variety of appellations including: Binky, Tuba, Brass, March, Unity, Buff, Monday, and Handy at Land's End plantation; Shepherd, Past Angel, Farmer, and Florida at Crescent Plantation; and Easter at Willow Point. Some of these names, such as Tuba and Buff, could have been adapted from older Afro-American names. However, other names seem an arbitrary selection and a by-product of a world in which slaves were seen as brutish animals or child-like appendages, completely divorced culturally and racially from their white owners. One female mistress from Alexandria exposed her racially dismissive views of blacks in an 1851 letter to her Massachusetts based sister. The enslaved woman Lucinda was "a perfect curiosity" fit for a circus and was so comical that "if barnum would buy Lucinda and exhibit her he would make a fortune" the mistress rejoined.¹¹⁰ At Willow Point, skin tone was used to differentiate between two of three female slaves named Susan. They were known as Susan (Black), Susan (Yellow), and Susan (Stallings), the latter descriptor was likely that of a former owner.¹¹¹ Terminology that indicated the physical appearance of a slave was used in reference to prime-aged hands of both genders, but was particularly prevalent when describing the appearance of young attractive slave women. These descriptors were used in the internal slave trade and in common parlance. The most popular term was "fancy" and it served as an umbrella term to indicate the appeal and desirability to white men looking to commodify, in more than one sense, a female house slave.¹¹² Some slaveholders and traders referred to these slave women as "custom." This label, with its eerie air of specificity, appeared on slave sale receipts such as the 1859 sale of "a custom negro girl-mulattress-named Jenny aged about 12 years," to a Bossier Parish slaveholder.¹¹³ When not using skin tones to individualize slaves, Red River slaveholders likened their chattel to livestock. Eliza Powell, wife of William Powell and mistress at Mount Flat plantation, drew up her will in 1860. In one section, she set out to delineate which slaves were property of her deceased daughter and which had always been her property. Five slaves

¹⁰⁹ 1854–1881 Daybook, George B. Marshall Family Papers, Mss. 969, LLMVC; 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1860 Plantation Journals, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC; 1852 and 1853 Plantation Journals, Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, Mss. 684, LLMVC. See also Agreement of Partnership Dissolution between Robert Hutchinson and William Hutchinson, December 2, 1857, William Joseph Hutchinson Family and Plantation Records, Collection 075, LSUS.

¹¹⁰ Anonymous Letter, Mss. 1008, LLMVC. Emphasis in original.

¹¹¹ 1854, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1860 Plantation Journals, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

¹¹² See also Johnson, *Soul by Soul*; Edward Baptist, "'Cuffy,'" "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men": Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Trade in the United States," *AHR* 106 (2001): 1619–1650; Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (NY: OUP, 1996); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 416.

¹¹³ Bill of Sale by William H. Dameron to Elizabeth P. Haynes, Ewing Family Papers, Mss. 183, LSUS. For a concise handling of the interstate trade in and market for attractive slave women, see Baptist, "'Cuffy,'" "Fancy Maids," and "One-Eyed Men."

are listed by name, then by complexion, and lastly by value. When describing Sarah, a fifteen-year-old slave, Powell estimates that she is “the value of a fine horse, say two hundred and fifty dollars.”¹¹⁴ Human property was conflated with animal property in the minds of Red River slaveholders, as it was for fugitive slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who also recalled the degrading process of being valued along with his master’s livestock. For Douglass and no doubt for Sarah, this crude racial reductionism highlighted the nameless, interchangeable tenor of this rough-hewn enslavement.¹¹⁵

Slaveholders also viewed slaves as repositories of potential income and their moveable nature made them ideal units to hire out whenever advantageous. Although slavery in the region remained a highly controlled, insular system, slaveholders were flexible when it came to hiring out or moving slaves in order to maximize assets. Pragmatic regional masters sometimes found slave hiring beneficial in order to realize income.¹¹⁶ Samuel Whitworth, who had moved across the Red to Texas, detailed his flexible response to slave work in a letter to his Caddo Parish based mother. Whitworth aimed to make the most money from his slaves while diversifying the output of his plantation. He had eight field hands and had recently decided to send two female slaves—one of them a cook—to work primarily in the house. He also had Julius, whose skills as a blacksmith caused Whitworth to consider other methods of accruing income. His letter noted that “it will be profitable to keep up a blacksmith shop,” especially since he already owned a skilled slave.¹¹⁷ Slaveholders like Whitworth were “hard, calculating businessmen” who priced their slaves and the labor derived from those slaves with shrewd management sensibility.¹¹⁸

Hiring out was a practice wherein a slaveholder still retained ownership of the slave but for multiple reasons—usually financially driven—they hired the slave to labor for another person. Various arrangements were on offer, but common practice involved the individual hiring the bondsperson to pay a set fee to the slaveholder and also pay for the maintenance of the slave, which included shelter and food. For periods of longer hire, such as a year, hiring agreements normally provided a set of clothing and shoes for the slave. For example, the agreement between Benjamin Cuny and J.B. Knapp for the yearlong hire of Ann stipulated that Knapp provided Ann with two suits of summer clothes and one for winter.¹¹⁹ Hiring out was far more common in urban areas of the South but was also prevalent in the new cotton districts such as Red River. The popularity and flexibility of slave rental arose because regional slaveholders did not want to lose money on their chattel and, at minimum, wished to avoid

¹¹⁴ Eliza Powell Will, 1860 (undated), Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹¹⁵ *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (NY: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), 49.

¹¹⁶ On the flexibility afforded by slave hiring see Jonathan Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slaveholding in the American South* (Cambridge: HUP, 2004). See also Keith Barton, ““Good Cooks and Washers”: Slave Hiring, Domestic Labor, and the Market in Bourbon County, Kentucky,” *JAH* 84 (1997): 436–60. Alexandria and Shreveport were the two regional cities, which limited urban demand for hired slaves, though it was present. Slaves were also hired as extra hands on smaller plantations during peak season. For discussion see Terry Seip, “Slaves and Free Negroes in Alexandria, 1850–1860,” *LH* 10 (1969): 147–165; Andrew Foshee, “Slave Hiring in Rural Louisiana,” *LH* 26 (1985): 63–73.

¹¹⁷ Samuel Whitworth to Margaret Whitworth, January 14, 1855, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

¹¹⁸ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 73.

¹¹⁹ Slave hire, March 9, 1851, Plantation Diary 1851–59, Benjamin Philip Cuny Family Papers, Mss. 4246, LLMVC.

taking on debt in order to maintain those slaves. In order to ensure that they would not lose funds—even during a productive year—certain slaves were hired out for a block of time or until the completion of a project. Henry Marston, for instance, hired out numerous slaves throughout 1857. He leased out four male slaves to Mr. Draughton on month long contracts of varying lengths. His slaves Bill and George were hired out together for the month of June, each at a monthly cost of \$16. He also hired out Jim for the month of June at the same rate. Additionally, he hired out Brown Joe from April until June 16 at a cost of \$48. In the span of three months, Marston had made ninety-six dollars from the labor of four of the slaves on Ashland, his Red River holding. Mr. Draughton again hired a Marston slave in July.¹²⁰ Marston also hired out the infantilized “Boy Dangerfield” from April 1st until July 1st at a fee of \$16 a month.¹²¹

Reliable money could be made by hiring out slaves to help with workloads on neighboring plantations or in one of the regional towns. Marston had begun the calendar year by hiring out “Boy Ben” for the month at \$20; however, he must have needed the labor of his chattel back on his plantation before the end of the month. The receipt for the hire indicates that Boy Ben was brought back to Ashland six days earlier than originally agreed. Additionally, Marston arranged another contract. He hired out Nat for three months and Charity for two, and garnered \$95 for the rental of these slaves. Mr. Draughton had commenced the year by hiring “Boy Bill” for a full year at the cost of \$185 and a barrel of potatoes. Marston also hired out Moses at a fee of \$20 for the month of October while also leased out George from October for a three-month contract at the same monthly cost.¹²² Mary Sibley reflected in a matter-of-fact manner over slave rental. She wrote her daughter that hiring out her female slaves in Alexandria kept them from idleness. She hired out Chaney since “she can get a plenty of work in town,” and subsequently leased out the same bondswoman the following year. In Mrs. Sibley’s estimation, her plantation’s 1855 crop was less than optimal and “if it does not rain” shortly, she would send “three or four of my negroes down next week” to hire out.¹²³ Renting out female slaves in local towns was another method utilized to maximize assets, or, in Sibley’s case, make ends meet. Chaney, who was both field hand and cook at Willow Point, was again hired out in 1859 for \$150 per annum.¹²⁴ Steamboat captains who transported cotton to market hired further slave labor. The region’s integration into the wider market economy ensured that multiple outlets were available to slaveholders with extra laborers who desired to profit still further from their chattel or deploy them to advantage when plantation operations slowed.

¹²⁰ Receipt for R.H. Draughton Hire, July 1857, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

¹²¹ Slave hire bill for J.F. Overton, July 1, 1857, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

¹²² Slave hire bill to E.W. Barnes, January 1857, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC; Slave hire bill to Clinton and Port Hudson Railroad Co, January 1857, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC; Slave hire bill to R.H. Draughton, January 29, 1857, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

¹²³ Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, May 31, 1855, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC; Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. W. F. Murray, May 5, 1856, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

¹²⁴ 1859 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

Violence played an integral role in the regulation and enforcement of slavery throughout the South and it was a commonplace feature of the cold, bleak, controlled slave system in the Red River region. Violence permeated the field and the plantation household. It was used in the fields to secure an “efficient use of labor” among the slaves, who were viewed by slaveholders as “ignorant and indolent vicious negroes.” Never one to mince words, Olmsted concluded that the “habits and customs of discipline,” were acknowledged as very cruel and vicious.¹²⁵ As three generations of historians have observed, the rigid power structure of slavery in tandem with the southern obsession with honor and individual defense bred a dependence on violence and its excessive application.¹²⁶ Violence rested at the crux of the interactions between white southern men and between slaveholder and slave. In the latter relationship, subjugation solidified the conventional use of violence to enforce racial stratification and control. Violence, and especially race-based violence, was a taught behavior. Slaveholding parents watched with approval as their children played at being overseer or doled out punishment—which often was physically inflicted by the youth—to the errant slave. Men and women learned the violent contours of the regional tenor from a young age.¹²⁷ The Red River region was an aggressive, brutal, chaotic place to be enslaved and where violence—especially meted out to slaves—was so commonplace that it hardly deserved notice. White settlers, nonetheless, noted the ferocious tenor of daily life. One mistress wrote her sister that inhabitants of Alexandria were “bad enough for anything” and that everyone “goes armed” and any altercations would be “met with certain death.”¹²⁸ When Gërstacker passed through Shreveport, he likewise described the rough, vitriolic city as a locale in which one was likely to receive “a knife wound or pistol bullet.”¹²⁹ This violent penchant was deeply ingrained in the region and would influence the extent of racialized violence throughout the nineteenth century.

Punishment proved so common that individual instances were rarely recorded and letters discuss cotton prospects but not the welfare or the punishment of the laborers cultivating the crop. Violence nonetheless undergirded the structure of enslavement and crafted a well-utilized language employed by slaveholders and overseers to reinforce labor control. The violence daily enacted without annotation for posterity resulted from a long history of “deriving power and meaning” from the values of mastery and from the integral role that violence played in the “mediation and maintenance of slavery.” In most instances “hellish punishment” did not require a large transgression or a significant decrease in picking amount.¹³⁰ On some holdings,

¹²⁵ Beveridge and McLaughlin, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 217.

¹²⁶ Franklin, *The Militant South*, 35. See also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*. 25th anniversary ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2007) and Elliott Gorn, ““Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch”: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry,” *AHR* 90 (1985): 18–43.

¹²⁷ Extensive work has been done on violence as a learned behavior in antebellum culture. For some groundwork, see Franklin, *The Militant South*, Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008); Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*.

¹²⁸ Anonymous Letter, Mss. 1008, LLMVC. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁹ Di Maio, trans., *Gërstacker's Louisiana*, 28.

¹³⁰ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 33, 45.

drivers cracked their whips while hurling insults. Other slaveholders and overseers maintained an aura of calm composure while whipping slaves.¹³¹ Indeed, Olmsted wrote that punishment was frequent and severe in the region. Olmsted never learned of any set rules for punishment; rather overseers and drivers “used the whip whenever they deemed there was an occasion.” Whenever an instance arose, the severity and manner of punishment remained at the discretion of the overseer or driver. Violence permeated Red River slavery and served as the remedy for “all wrong-doing, whether of indolence or indiscretion,” while an insubordinate slave was often killed. Brutality proved so prevalent that one Red River overseer declared to Olmsted: “I wouldn’t mind killing a negro more than I would a dog.”¹³² Rendered once again into an animal, the overseer equated human murder with the cold, detached dispatch of a dog. Solomon Northup, who had been tied to a high tree and bound for a whole day when his cotton picking pace lagged in the field, stated that the crack of the lash could be “heard from dark till bed time” on the region’s plantations. The Louisiana Slave Codes listed detailed punishment for a host of slave infractions including 39 lashes if a slave trespassed, 25 lashes for riding a horse without permission, and 20 lashes for leaving the plantation without a pass. The codes also included fines for persons who taught slaves to write (12 months in jail), a sentence of hard labor, life imprisonment or death for publishing items to “produce discontent,” and fixed rewards for capturing runaways. Despite stipulations for certain slave transgressions, the Codes did not specify a limit or prescribe the number of lashes for labor-based offenses. Instead, owners were largely free to deal how they liked with their property.¹³³ Though no rules mandated the severity or form of punishment, the number of lashes was usually exponentially higher the more severe the transgression. For example, Northup recalled that twenty-five lashes was “a mere brush” inflicted when a piece of boll or a dry leaf was found in the cotton; fifty served as the ordinary penalty while one hundred lashes was a severe punishment used for the “serious offence of standing idle in the field.” The most severe punishments included between 150 and 200 lashes, though slaveholders employed such brutal treatment infrequently.¹³⁴ Pregnancy did not check the frequency or severity of whipping. Instead, an overseer who wanted to whip a pregnant slave had a hole dug “an’ made her lay acrost in an’ her han’s and foots were tied.”¹³⁵ This method occurred even during the late stages of pregnancy, and punishments would still remain quite severe, since slaveholders claimed the burying of the belly protected the fetus.

Whipping remained the preferred method for punishing slaves, though other gruesome punishments were also customary. Fogel and Engerman indicated that the penchant for whipping arose because the lash did not generally lead to an extended loss of the slave’s labor

¹³¹ On “calm and deliberate” whipping see Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 64–67; Drew Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1982).

¹³² Beveridge and McLaughlin, *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted*, 219–220.

¹³³ Black Code, 50–83 in *The Statutes of the State of Louisiana, Revised and prepared by U.B. Phillips, under the direction of a Joint Committee of the Legislature* (New Orleans: E. LaSere, 1855).

¹³⁴ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 63–70, 103, 105.

¹³⁵ Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 231.

time. Throughout the South, but particularly in profit-centric regions like Red River, labor was exceptionally important and punishment aimed to drive maximum performance in the fields. In the main, masters desired punishments which were painful and brutal to the slave but with “minimum impairment to the human capital which the master owned.”¹³⁶ The scattered notations of punishments in the 1859 Willow Point journal are in keeping with that assertion. Daily whippings formed the mainstay of plantation management as standard daily picking rates jumped to 150 pounds by the 1830s and up to nearly 300 pounds in the 1850s.¹³⁷ Northup’s final master, Edwin Epps, used the lash regularly on lagging slaves and would often appear in the field without warning and whip his slaves. At the close of daily picking, the cotton would be weighed, a procedure that caused “fear and trembling” in every approach to the gin house. If too little cotton had been picked the slave would be whipped; if the amount exceeded then the picking amount for the next day was established.¹³⁸ With either too little or too much cotton in the basket, field slaves lived under constant threat of violence.

In addition to violence meted out in the fields and in connection with cotton cultivation, violence was frequently occurred within the space of the plantation household and occasionally for the twisted pleasure of slaveholders. Thavolia Glymph’s persuasive work exposes the prevalence of extreme brutality within the household domain and at the hand of mistresses. White slaveholding women used violence to reinforce power structures. For mistresses as well as masters, violence was integral in shaping their identity as slaveholders.¹³⁹ Mistress Epps had no qualms about wielding the lash and frequently whipped a field hand named Patsey, though she also enjoyed when her husband punished Patsey for her pleasure or to suit his own fancy. She also stood with her children and watched in “heartless satisfaction” as her husband administered Patsey’s infamous whipping. Patsey was beaten so severely that her painful screams ceased as she fainted from pain.¹⁴⁰ Clearly, the viciousness of this beating derived not just from personal enmity and contempt toward the prostrate bondswoman, but Mistress Epps also revealed the gendered component to this racially charged violence.

Slaveholders also employed punishment to maintain a level of docility among bondspeople and they utilized these excessive displays of violence for regulatory effect on the enslaved. Slaveholders believed that slaves often became uncontrollable and independent and needed frequent punishment to maintain plantation efficiency and the hierarchies of racial bondage. They felt, as shown by Mrs. Sibley, that public retribution served “infant advantage” to quell the “entirely too boisterous and defying” behavior of their slaves.¹⁴¹ Some slaves were penalized and brutalized due to their mixed-race parentage, particularly when it involved the

¹³⁶ Fogel and Engerman, *Time on the Cross*, 147.

¹³⁷ Wright, *Slavery and American Economic Development*, 90.

¹³⁸ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 94–97.

¹³⁹ Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 5. See also Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1988).

¹⁴⁰ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 150–155.

¹⁴¹ Mrs. Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, June 23, 1855, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

progeny of a master and a slave woman. Hatred of the child could derive from the father himself or from the plantation mistress, resulting in a torturous existence for the child. One DeSoto parish slaveholder relentlessly mistreated his slave son, J.W. Terrill, requiring him to wear a bell “strapped ‘round my shoulders with the bell ‘about three feet from my head in a steel frame” until he was twenty-one. He was unable to lie down and his father often chained him to a tree. On one occasion, Terrill’s father strapped him to a tree and whipped him “like a beast” until he was unconscious. Treated like a captured animal, he was left tied to the tree for the entire night. This brutal practice remained popular with Master Terrill, who often had his overseer mete out this punishment with an additional “39 licks” for not working fast enough.¹⁴² On Terrill’s estate, as on countless others, violence prevailed in multiple forms and its frequent occurrence made it a commonplace facet of life. It was so commonplace and accepted, in fact, that it rarely merited acknowledgement in planters’ papers or correspondence.

Slaves toiled in sprawling cotton fields from sunup to sundown with the rhythm of their work punctuated by short breaks to eat and the slicing sounds of the overseer’s whip. Nature dictated the structure and length of the workday, with a shortened day during the winter cultivation period and markedly longer days in the summer. Planters found the introduction and increased popularity of the clock to be a useful regulatory and disciplinary device. Slaveholders had always used the natural indications of time’s passage and clock time was eagerly adopted in large part because clocks “simultaneously satisfied” planters’ drive for profit and discipline. Clocks were used in a variety of ways to regulate work times, the duration of breaks, and to time slaves’ rates of work.¹⁴³ This mechanized management added an additional sound to the aural landscape. Though slaveholders often imagined and recollected antebellum life as one of quietude and singing slaves, everyday plantation life was ordered by the sounds of clocks, bells, and horns.¹⁴⁴ Charley Williams, a Red River slave, remembered the regimentation of work, which began before daybreak, and the cacophony of noise that accompanied each day. Even before the bells rang out, slaves were rushing to prepare victuals. Bells at nearby plantations could be heard on windy mornings but “old Master’s old ram horn wid a long toot and den some short toots” daily prefaced the overseer “hollering right and left” down the row of cabins. The bells and horn signaled the choreography of the plantation routine. As Williams recalled, “bells and horns! Bells for dis and horns for dat! All we knowed was go and come by de bells and horns!”¹⁴⁵ Bells and horns were present on the Epp’s plantation as well. Northup stated that the horn was blown an hour before daylight and the offence of tardiness to the field was always a

¹⁴² Berlin, Favreau, and Miller, *Remembering Slavery*, 147–149. Terrill’s punishment is also chronicled in Malone, *Sweet Chariot*.

¹⁴³ Mark Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1997), 5, 112, 117, 118.

¹⁴⁴ Mark Smith, *Listening to Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2001), 6, 13, 37–38.

¹⁴⁵ Berlin, Favreau, Miller, eds., *Remembering Slavery*, 84–86.

flogging.¹⁴⁶ The modernized auralty and strict timekeeping of the Red River slaveholders instituted oversleeping as another infraction regulated by violence.

Slaves roused from their slumber by the morning bells awoke in rudimentary wooden shacks. Generally, these living quarters were fairly uniform in construction throughout the South, with the main variation being their form as a single or double cabin. The historical record does not indicate which was more popular in the Red River region. However, double cabins, with their shared chimney and built-in front roof overhang, would probably have been more common on larger holdings and a more likely edifice on those plantations with slaves who worked in the big house. In Natchitoches and its environs, the creole cottage architecture prevailed but there is little evidence that these structures existed along the upper Red. Overwhelmingly, field slaves lived in wooden, single cabins approximately sixteen feet by twenty feet of paltry construction. Planters erected single-pen dwellings a distance away from the slaveholder home.¹⁴⁷ Bill Homer, enslaved near Shreveport, remembered his former plantation had “fifty one-room cabins and dey was ten in a row and dere was five rows.” He noted that the dwellings were “built of logs and had dirt floors” and had a hole in the wall in place of a window. A stone fireplace provided a heat source and cooking venue.¹⁴⁸ The overseer at Willow Point plantation was fastidious about neatness in the quarters and inspected them every Sunday. Dwellings not meeting his expectations resulted in punishment for the inhabitants.¹⁴⁹ Elsewhere, slave cabins were swiftly assembled with little foresight for their inhabitants. For example, Solomon Northup stated that his cabin was constructed of logs but lacked the window hole present in Homer’s cabin, though the gaping crevices in between the logs admitted both light and rain. Northup’s cabin possessed a “rude door” on wooden hinges and was furnished with a narrow plank bed, a stick of wood for a pillow, and a coarse blanket.¹⁵⁰ These crude cabins provided little respite and comfort for the beleaguered chattel of the region who continued to reside in these hastily constructed structures long after the frontier phase of settlement.

The single-minded concentration on cotton cultivation also had adverse effects on slave nutrition. Red River slaveholders focused on cotton with an exclusivity that directed energy and resources to the detriment of an internal slave economy. Without the framework to supplement the diets of slaves—and perhaps of slaveholders—most bondspeople consumed a repetitive diet lacking in vitamins and minerals. In fact, the Louisiana Slave Codes only required masters to

¹⁴⁶ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Roderick McDonald, *The Economy and Material Culture of Slaves: Goods and Chattels on the Sugar Plantations of Jamaica and Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1993), 129–131; John Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1993), 22, 153, 158. See also Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*.

¹⁴⁸ Vlach, *Back of the Big House*, 12, 156.

¹⁴⁹ 1854 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

¹⁵⁰ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 99.

give slaves one barrel of Indian corn, or equivalent, per month.¹⁵¹ Unlike other slaveholding areas, little evidence remains to indicate that slaves supplemented their diet with vegetables grown on personal garden plots or with fish and game hunted from the surrounding environs. The 1854 Willow Point plantation journal contains scattered mentions of slave gardens but there is no record of the proficiency or impact of these agricultural gardens. Slaveholders believed that salt pork was the best meat for enslaved and, as on Willow Point plantation, bestowed it with nourishing properties that made it the “fuel upon which the efficiency of labor depended.”¹⁵² Slaveholders raised corn alongside cotton, which stemmed from corn’s wide availability and low production costs. Planters also planted field peas, cowpeas, and beans among the corn, which would have provided additional nutrition to those slaves.¹⁵³ The diet of the region’s slaveholders, particularly the small and mid-sized slaveholders, was likely more restricted and coarser than in many gentrified plantation sections of the Mississippi Valley. However, the protein sources, diversity and quantity of foods, and preparation styles utilized by slaveholders was greater than those available to the enslaved, particularly as the region became a settled plantation area. Fatty cuts of meat paired with corn and the occasional molasses ration created a high caloric diet for slaves but one deficient in protein, vitamins C and D, essential amino acids, calcium, and iron.¹⁵⁴ This nutritionally inadequate diet coupled with quantities disparate to the labor expended led to health issues, high rates of infections, and played role in the higher morbidity and mortality rates of the slave community.¹⁵⁵ Willow Point’s plantation journal and Northup record the slave rations. Northup received three and a half pounds of bacon and a peck of corn. Master Epps fed his hogs on shelled corn but threw corn to his slaves by the ear; Epps reckoned the hogs would “fatten faster by shelling, and soaking” the corn but felt that slaves treated in the same manner “might grow too fat to labor.” The ten children at Willow Point collectively received five pecks while each full hand got a peck of corn per week; the overseer received four pecks per week.¹⁵⁶ This average allowance of meat and corn was considered the standard by southern slaveholders, who did not adjust the allowance in accordance with extended work hours and heat during peak cultivation and picking periods.¹⁵⁷

Underfed and unquestionably undernourished, Red River chattel encountered a culture of violence and expropriation permeated the region. Under this power structure there were far

¹⁵¹ Black code, Section 87, *The Statutes of the State of Louisiana*, 67. In contrast, an 1814 law required white prisoners be given a per diem allowance of “one pound of beef or three-quarters of a pound of pork, one pound of vegetables, one pound of potatoes or a comparable portion of rice, four quarts of vinegar, and a small salt allowance.” See Gilles Vandal, “Regulating Louisiana’s Rural Areas: The Functions of Parish Jails, 1840–1885,” *LH* 42 (2001): 71.

¹⁵² Kiple and King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora*, 82; 1854 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC.

¹⁵³ Hillard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 153, 162.

¹⁵⁴ Todd Savitt, “Black Health on the Plantation: Masters, Slaves, and Physicians,” in Ronald Numbers and Todd Savitt, eds., *Science and Medicine in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1989), 342; Hillard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 58. See also Vandal, “Regulating Louisiana’s Rural Areas.”

¹⁵⁵ Savitt, “Black Health on the Plantation: Masters, Slaves, and Physicians,” 342; Kiple and King, *Another Dimension to the Black Diaspora*, 88–100.

¹⁵⁶ Eakin, ed., *The Autobiography of Solomon Northup*, 99; 1856 Plantation Journal, Joseph Toole Robinson Papers, Mss. 1413, LLMVC. A peck is equivalent to two gallons or eight dry quarts.

¹⁵⁷ Hillard, *Hog Meat and Hoecake*, 104.

fewer instances of successful runaways that in other parts of the South. The physical geographic isolation of the region as well as the cold, animalistic tenor of enslavement created an environment that made flight an unlikely pathway out of slavery. Particularly in the zones north of Alexandria and Colfax, the terrain is sparsely wooded and the verdant land lightly undulates out from the steep banks of the Red. The lack of cover for hiding and environmental protection made flight highly dangerous. Fugitives also faced a tightly knit police structure. J.P. Flournoy recalled that large slaveholders had “overseers and they rode the public roads at night” in search of slaves without the requisite permit from a master allowing a slave to travel. Individuals found on the road were “sent home and punished,” and Flournoy states slaves were then not permitted to travel for several months.¹⁵⁸ Those slaves who attempted flight were undoubtedly punished to the satisfaction of the slaveholder within the private fiefdom of the plantation. Records do not elucidate the frequency of runaways or the punishment administered and so it must be deduced that attempts at flight were stifled with alacrity and pointed punishment or that instances whereby those methods of detainment and restriction proved unsuccessful and insufficient occurred rarely. Those slaves who successfully escaped the plantation confines faced slave patrols that hunted them down. These patrols included either individuals paid by a slaveholder to recapture “a specific bondsman in a short period of time” or a group of local whites drawn from the community and appointed for a limited period of time as patrollers. These patrols were not a nightly occurrence but were mobilized when alarm was raised or at the discretion of the community. Slave patrols would often sweep through plantations to search slave quarters and break up anything that might constitute a slave gathering. These patrols would also safeguard the area around plantations and town by riding or walking the roads and demanding passes from any slave found off the plantations.¹⁵⁹ Most runaways who eluded the initial patrols were found and brought to local jails for collection by owners. In 1853, Nilson ran away from Pre Aux Cleres. The plantation overseer later retrieved him at the cost of ten dollars from jail.¹⁶⁰ When a slave escaped William Powell’s Mount Flat plantation in August 1854, he wrote to the local jailor to locate his lost property. The slave—about forty years old, “very black rather slender made, had large whiskers”—had been found and Powell was eager to reclaim his chattel.¹⁶¹ Slaveholders in Caddo and Bossier Parish frequently advertised runaways in the local newspapers whenever slave patrols failed to recapture escapees. Bold advertisements crammed with details about the runaways ran briefly in the papers.¹⁶² These notices produced the desired result—return of the slaveholder property—rather quickly because repetitions of announcements were few. Indeed, recaptured slaves faced violent repercussions for depriving

¹⁵⁸ J.P. Flournoy, “Shreveport and Caddo Parish as I Remember it in the Early Sixties,” Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC.

¹⁵⁹ Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Cambridge: HUP, 2001), 80, 82, 107–109.

¹⁶⁰ 1852–1853 Plantation Journal, Pre Aux Cleres Plantation Record Books, Mss. 684, LLMVC.

¹⁶¹ William Powell to “Dear Sir”, August 9, 1854, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹⁶² “Stop the Runaways,” *South West Shreveport*, November 22, 1854; “Runaway,” “Committed to Jail,” *South West Shreveport* June–August, 1854.

slaveholders of their labor. In the highly controlled and self-contained world of the Red River, the brutal nature of racialized enslavement and the unforgiving regional landscape deterred escape and limited the possibility for successful flight. Tragically for the enslaved, little could ultimately direct the region away from its vehement commitment to racial bondage.

Life in the Red River region was defined and buttressed by the cultivation of cotton. As this chapter makes clear, increased global demand for cotton drove the region's market-oriented slaveholders. The clearing of the Red allowed frequent and more reliable traffic between the economic hub of New Orleans and northwest Louisiana, which enabled expansion and solidified the significance of cotton. Slaveholders concentrated on maximum gain from the bountiful soil and commodified land and labor in pursuit of financial success. Like the cotton they raised, slaves were commodities and, as laboring objects, they were required to extract maximum productivity from each holding. This commitment to the land and to slavery created a bleak and violent system of enslavement. Undoubtedly, slavery was embedded in the region's composition and it defined the fingerprint of antebellum Red River life. Although slaveholders like Mrs. Sibley believed dependence on slave labor made them "the Slave of Slaves," the contours of the fingerprint were engrained in the fabric of racial identity and monetary success.¹⁶³ Red River slaveholders acquired wealth derived from their human property, and when these interests in land, labor, and the financial gain from both were challenged by the election of Republican Abraham Lincoln, regional slaveholders rallied to the Confederate cause.

¹⁶³ Mary Wells Sibley to Mrs. Thomas Henry Morris, June 23, 1856, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

Chapter Three

“They Will Have Yankee Masters As Well As Us”: The Civil War and a World Turned Upside Down

Abraham Lincoln became the sixteenth president on November 6, 1860. His election brought to a crescendo decades of sectional conflict that intensified over the prior decade. The election of a moderate Republican, with a longstanding record of public opposition to the expansion of slavery, solidified the direction of northern and southern politics and positioned slavery firmly center stage in the sectional crisis. Between Lincoln’s election in November and his March inauguration, South Carolina seceded from the Union and was soon followed by six other southern states. Together, they formed the Confederate States of America, and met in Montgomery, Alabama to elect Jefferson Davis as president on February 4, 1861. The bombardment of Fort Sumter on April 12, threw the nation into civil war and, throughout the course of the war, slavery remained at the heart of the conflict. In northwest Louisiana, commitment remained strong and overwhelming to the Confederate cause and to the goals of the Confederate nation. Deeply committed to a society founded on land and slaves, steadfast regional loyalty to the Confederacy endured throughout the war. This commitment, in tandem with the remote and protected nature of the region, made it ideal as Confederate headquarters, with Shreveport designated capital of the Trans-Mississippi West and the Confederate state of Louisiana. Virtually untouched by the Civil War, the Red River region endured the tumult of emancipation, but the Confederate loss did ultimately turn the region’s world upside down. However, the slaveholders’ retention of and their reliance upon the power structure of slavery and the mentality of slaveholding throughout the war ensured, irrespective of the enormous shift as free labor replaced slavery, that Red River whites remained unreconstructed, particularly on the question of race. Emancipation arrived belatedly to the Red River and the unshaken habits and power dynamic of the region’s unreconstructed former slaveholders cemented the violent, visceral nature of Reconstruction.

Slavery was not the only issue that defined the political landscape of the 1850s but it permeated all other political concerns during the antebellum era.¹ By its very nature, slavery

¹ The literature on the political upheaval of the antebellum era is extensive. Some titles that deal with the secession crisis and the political landscape of the period include: David Potter, *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1968) and *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (NY: HR, 1976); William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Volume II, Secessionists Triumphant, 1854–1861* (NY: OUP, 2007), *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (NY: OUP, 1994), and *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (NY: HR, 1965); Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of the Civil War* (NY: HW, 1992); Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848–1865* (NY: OUP, 2012); Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (NY: OUP, 1989); Jennifer Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln’s Opponents in the North* (NY: OUP, 2006); Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (NY: Norton, 1983); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (NY: OUP, 1970) and *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (NY: Norton, 2010); Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (NY: OUP,

was a charged topic, whether debated in a political arena or practiced at the slave markets of New Orleans. The distinctive but dependent labor systems employed in the North and South shaped regional tenors and these cultural values influenced political life. With neither the North nor the South politically independent, antebellum growth aggravated sectional tensions, undermined political cooperation, and reorganized political life.²

The 1850s was a turbulent political time throughout the United States. The sectional issue moved ever more towards the center stage of politics and the political landscape came to be defined by both the question of the expansion of slavery into new territories and a hardening of the political parties along geographic lines. The Whig Party, which had maintained a strong following in Caddo Parish and in southern Louisiana, handicapped itself through repeated definition in opposition to the Democratic Party and other political opponents, which crippled the party's ability to maintain a unified base.³ At its inception, the Whigs strove to promote unity and had brought various political factions together in the hope of keeping North and South together, but the practice of defining themselves in a two-party system in opposition to the Democratic Party forced interparty conflict and division.⁴ The Whigs more or less dissolved by the end of 1852 and the Democratic Party, which had always been the preferred party in northern Louisiana, set about solidifying control throughout the state and, indeed, the South. Notably, with the emergence of the Republican Party 1856, the slavery issue stood alone. Democrats began to cloak the national discussion surrounding the slavery debate in more ominous tones and, for Louisiana Democrats, the political discourse became permeated by a combination of abolitionist allegations and the opposition to Republican victory with threats of disunion.⁵ Thus, after the 1855 gubernatorial election, most Louisiana politicians, "regardless of party affiliation, agreed on most issues."⁶

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was a central point in the 1855 Louisiana state elections, and the Democrats used the vote on this act to show that only they could be trusted on the slavery issue. Following the Dred Scott decision of 1857 and the mounting tensions in Kansas, sectional alliance became more overt and federalism, or the division of political authority between state and federal government, became strained against state allegiance. More than ever for southerners, the flow of allegiance was local and then national, and most southerners came to

1994); William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (NY: OUP, 1988); Paul Escott, "What Shall We Do With The Negro?": *Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: UVAP, 2009).

² Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free*, 14–16.

³ For the breakdown of party votes by region see table 5 and map 2 in John Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824–1861* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2003), 182, 183.

⁴ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) and *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*; Kohl, *Politics of Individualism*, 5. Sacher notes that for Louisiana Whigs, the decline of the party coincided with the Whigs' foremost state-level issue, constitutional revision. Following the ratification of a new state constitution in 1852, Whigs could no longer use their advocacy of this issue as a defining feature to differentiate themselves from Democrats. For more on this, see Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 222–223.

⁵ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 253–254.

⁶ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 249.

value their state citizenship above national.⁷ In the aftermath of the Lecompton constitution—which was endorsed by President Buchanan but rejected by prominent northern Democrat, Stephen Douglas and resulted in the breakup of the national Democratic party—Louisiana Democrats experienced some division. As a collective whole, however, the feeling within the state moved swiftly towards secession. This predilection was bolstered by the 1860 gubernatorial address of Thomas Overton Moore, a slaveholder from Rapides Parish. In his address, Moore directly discussed the issue of secession and stated that Louisiana would leave the Union if her southern sisters did. He felt that if the Republicans, particularly with Abraham Lincoln as the candidate, captured the presidency, that the South and her interests would not be represented.⁸ This public declaration of Southern fealty perfectly matched feelings in the Red River region, where the nomination of Lincoln was met with abject horror. Northwest Louisiana was decidedly pro-slavery and its expansion and continued vitality. There was resilient opposition from this region towards the Republican Party, which was crystalized by the choice of Lincoln as the Republican candidate in the 1860 election.

The abhorrence of the Republican Party and, most keenly, of Lincoln made the decision about secession cut and dry for the Red River region. Throughout the region, in both action and in their decisiveness on the secession issue, there was an extreme confidence in slavery and in its power. During the 1850s and up until the secession convention in 1861, slaveholders were still moving to the region, and slaveholders already settled there continued to invest in more slaves and land throughout the decade. The letters of regional slaveholders are populated with discussions of crops, crop management and expansion, rainfall and environmental management, and slave output. In years where the crop is less fruitful than desired, these market-orientated slaveholders write about hiring out slaves to generate additional income and cover plantation costs. Quite a few letters from the latter portion of the decade contain conversations about new lands and speak to the continual scouting of land for the expansion of the cotton frontier, as well as the unbridled confidence of regional slaveholders in the institution of slavery and in cotton.

There is no talk of national politics, of the Kansas-Nebraska issue or the Dred Scott decision, or, indeed, any debate concerning the slavery question in the letters examined in and available in the archives. There is no discussion of the 1860 presidential candidates in the lead-up to the election in the letters and papers of Red River slaveholders. Instead, their letters continued to focus on cotton production and price, cotton expansion and new seed varieties, land purchases and land prices, settlement, and slave acquisition. These slaveholders continued to keep their eyes peeled for good new lands to acquire and on crop prices. The region was unified in their extreme stance on Lincoln. When Lincoln secured the nomination and then, to the disgust of voters throughout the South, won the subsequent election, Red River whites

⁷ Quigley, *Shifting Grounds*, 41-44.

⁸ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 268, 278-280.

became increasingly strident in their feelings against the Union. Northwest Louisiana was committed to the Confederacy even before secession.

In Louisiana, as in many of the slave states, Lincoln was conspicuous by his absence on the state's ballot papers for the 1860 presidential election. Though Lincoln won a solid 54 percent of the Northern popular vote, he only won two percent of the southern vote.⁹ Louisiana's electoral return placed states' rights southern Democrat John Breckinridge with 45 percent of the vote, Cooperationist and Constitutional Unionist John Bell with 40 percent, and northern Democrat Stephen Douglas with just 15 percent of the vote. Breckinridge polled strongest in north Louisiana where he secured nearly 55 percent of the vote. Veteran politician John Slidell summed up the political transformation thusly to President Buchanan: "Louisiana will act with her sister states of the South. I see no probability of preserving the Union, nor indeed do I consider it desirable to do so if we could."¹⁰ For white Louisianans, the election of Lincoln threatened to upset the equality of the individual states within the Union and it marked the culmination of the long-feared political isolation of the South. With South Carolina turning secession from threat to reality, Louisiana Unionism crumbled, and Louisiana's state and congressional delegates now quickly reconsidered their state's future within the Union. Rapides Parish resident Governor Thomas Overton Moore, who had previously been opposed in private to immediate secession but had been publically vocal about a southern conference to decide the secession issue, reversed his public position, and annulled his private one, very shortly after Lincoln's election. He swiftly convened a special legislature on December 10, 1860 that approved an election on January 7, 1861 to decide if the state would send delegates to a secession convention.¹¹ As Moore flatly declared, "I do not think it comports with the honor and self-respect of Louisiana, as a slaveholding State, to live under the Government of a Black Republican President."¹²

The January 7 election was conducted on the same basis as a regular legislative election and thus each senatorial and representative district had the same number of seats in the convention as it had in the legislature. Louisiana voters could choose between immediate, unconditional secession, or secession later if other states also seceded. The January 7 election resulted in a staggering victory for the secessionist forces, with a majority of the delegates agreeing on a radical, straight-out secession platform and expressing "intolerance for anyone

⁹ Willie Caskey, *Secession and Restoration of Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1938), 12; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 143–144. For additional information see James Greer, "Louisiana Politics, 1845–1861," *LHQ* 13 (January 1930): 444–483; Mary McLure, "The Election of 1860 in Louisiana," *LHQ* 9 (October 1926): 601–702; Lane Kendall, "The Interregnum in Louisiana in 1861," *LHQ* 16 (April 1933): 374–408; and Murat Halstead, *Three Against Lincoln: Murat Halstead Reports the Caucuses of 1860* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1960).

¹⁰ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties*, 289.

¹¹ Caskey, *Secession and Restoration of Louisiana*, 18; Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 287–292; Charles Roland, "Louisiana and Secession," *LH* 19 (Autumn 1978): 392–393.

¹² Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 290.

who continued to object to their actions.”¹³ The last remaining Unionists strongholds, notably among Crescent City merchants and pro-tariff sugar planters, collapsed under the weight of secessionist support. Even those whom had voted for Bell weeks earlier now switched allegiances to the more radical cause and, by late December, New Orleans emerged as a “hotbed of secession.”¹⁴ North Louisiana slaveholders were enthused by the turn of events. In a letter to her cousin in Caddo Parish, one slaveholder remarked, “I much prefer this state of affairs to the Abolition terrors that we had to contend with all summer.”¹⁵ Along the Red, secession provided a clear opportunity for slaveholders to protect the profit-driven cultivation of land and extraction of labor that undergirded regional prosperity. It also provided an opportunity to quell white fears of an insurgency akin to John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry while it also stemmed the alarm over an impending slave revolt that had gripped much of the South in the run-up to the 1860 election. Since Lincoln and his election encapsulated the abolition terrors that gripped Red River planters, this sharp turn toward political independence highlighted the pronounced shift of many former cooperationists into a more radical stance toward secession.¹⁶ Published secessionist votes totaled 20,448 votes and at the January 23 convention, these elected delegates adopted an ordinance of secession.¹⁷ Three days later, Louisiana officially seceded from the Union.

The cotton parishes along the Red River emerged as the stronghold of secessionist sentiment. Enthusiasm for the cause soared along the Red River as votes were cast for the secession convention. Indeed the senatorial district returns indicate that secessionists outpolled cooperationists two to one with 2,123 secession votes in Caddo, DeSoto, Natchitoches, and Sabine Parishes with 961 secession votes in Bienville and Bossier Parishes and 933 votes in Rapides. Only the left bank of Orleans Parish possessed more secession votes than the Red River region.¹⁸ The total returns statewide show the Secessionists with 20,214 votes to 18,451 Cooperationist votes. It was by no means a landslide election but the immediate secessionists won a majority of the vote.¹⁹ Secession candidates were elected on a wave of support in DeSoto Parish, though elsewhere votes were tighter. Henry Marshall, of Land’s End plantation in Caddo, led a mobilizing force in northern Louisiana for secession and was subsequently elected

¹³ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 298; Charles Dew, “Who Won the Secession Election in Louisiana?”, *JSH* 36 (February 1970): 19, 21.

¹⁴ Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 295.

¹⁵ Virginia Yenger to “My dear cousin,” December 9, 1860, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. In *Shifting Grounds*, Quigley points out that “secessionists’ successes masked the strength and vitality of southern Unionism throughout the secession winter” and indeed especially for non-slaveholders, “northern aggression was still not sufficient to warrant the ultimate act of political separation (125–126).”

¹⁶ Roland, “Louisiana and Secession,” 395–396. Roland also notes “by recognizing that the secession of Louisiana was indeed revolution, and that the convention delegates and most if not all the population were aware of this fact, we bring their actions into truer historical perspective (398).”

¹⁷ Charles Dew, “The Long Lost Returns: The Candidates and Their Totals in Louisiana’s Secession Election,” *LH* 10 (Autumn 1969), 358. Dew’s article collates all of the official vote returns in one location. He, along with other historians, has pointed out the issues both at the time and in the historical record with the vote returns.

¹⁸ Dew, “Who Won the Secession Election in Louisiana?”, 29.

¹⁹ Dew, “The Long Lost Returns,” 357–358. Dew states that the fairest test of the returns is based on the totals from the senatorial districts since they have fewer unopposed candidates.

as a delegate to the state secession convention as one of four senatorial representatives from Caddo, DeSoto, Natchitoches, and Sabine Parishes. Lewis Texada, the owner of a sprawling river fronting plantation and whose father settled in Rapides in 1832, was also elected as a parish representative for Rapides.²⁰ Small and medium sized slaveholders elected to the secession convention also constituted the largest percentage to vote for immediate secession. Delegates with one to nine slaves comprised 17.5 percent, those with ten to nineteen slaves made up 25 percent, and officials with twenty to twenty-nine slaves constituted 15 percent of the immediate secession vote. Most of these slaveholding delegates also grew cotton, owned improved land in 1860, and held both more slaves and more land, on average, than cooperationists.²¹ The cotton fields that sprawled along the Red River cultivated a fierce commitment to political independence among its white inhabitants. Across northern Louisiana, the gamut of slaveholders from small holdings with one or two bondpeople to planters with twenty or more slaves translated their adherence to slavery and slave-based cotton cultivation into the voting majority for secession.

The Red River's pride in and commitment to the southern cause most clearly manifested itself in bountiful volunteering enthusiasm. Mere days after official secession, Henry Marshall received a note detailing the roll of volunteers and the oaths of the captains of the newly created Pelican Rifles of DeSoto. The Pelican Rifles were the first company to leave Louisiana and one of Marshall's two Confederate enlisted sons fought and died with the Pelicans. Marshall's other son enlisted in the second cavalry. Both of Marshall's sons joined the Confederate forces shortly after the formation of the Confederate States of America (CSA).²² A slaveholding friend of Marshall's wrote the delegate that determination to sustain the Confederate cause permeated the entirety of the region. For them, the "great war question" would "open to the world the principle that the great American idea of the right to make their own government was right—and that this is the last time this right will be questioned . . . there is no dissension here all support the war."²³ John Houston, a resident of Springhill, located at the uppermost portion of Bossier Parish near the Arkansas border, wrote his Minden-based brother-in-law with plans for his participation and chronicled the volunteer spirit throughout the Red. Northern Louisiana "answered nobly to the call for troops," he observed, and locally mustered units such as the Coushatta Rifles had left in early September 1861. Houston hoped to remain on his Red River holding for most of the year but because the "war excitement does not abate in this country," he continued apace with cotton production while the threat of invasion remained far from Louisiana borders. Houston wrote that the current crop was "the finest . . . I ever saw in this country," but he would cease his labors to defend Louisiana "if our state is

²⁰ Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 4042, 2740, LLMVC; Dew, "The Long Lost Returns," 359, 361, 363, 366.

²¹ Ralph Wooster, "The Louisiana Secession Convention," *LHQ* 34 (April 1951): 112, 114, 118–119.

²² J.E. Wallace by request of Capt. J.M. Williams to Henry Marshall, January 28, 1861, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 4042, 2740, LLMVC; Ancestral Homes of DeSoto, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS.

²³ L.H. Bowden to Henry Marshall, May 20, 1861, Josephine C. Means Papers, Collection 335A, LSUS. Emphasis in original.

invaded this winter.” The expectation that they would soon come to Louisiana’s doorstep drew strong volunteering. Impressive enlistment numbers were commonplace in the region and Houston noted that the militias “are drilling in nearly every parish,” a claim substantiated by the 980 military companies quickly organized by communities throughout Louisiana.²⁴ Houston’s observations were echoed by Caddo Parish slaveholder Alfred Flournoy, who noted, “never before have volunteers enlisted with more promptness. Every parish is doing her duty.” Flournoy, who began his family’s migration to Caddo in the 1830s, wrote “glorious old caddo has raised three more companies. Two have started and one will leave next week.”²⁵ Flournoy’s offspring, like Henry Marshall’s sons and numerous unrecorded others from established Red River families, were members of the first companies mustered into service at the start of the war and remained devoted to the cause until the bitter end.

The Confederate government requested that Louisiana furnish three thousand volunteers for a twelve-month tenure in April 1861 and shortly thereafter requested a further five thousand troops. The overwhelming response forced Governor Moore to request units wait at home until another enlistment call enabled him to dispatch units. Militia units all reported to New Orleans and the first Louisiana regiments left for Virginia on April 28, 1861. Although Governor Moore understood that the state would organize and muster companies into state service and then into regiments for Confederate service, many individuals received the authority to organize units directly from the Confederate government. Thus many eager volunteer units were mustered into service without ever coming under the jurisdiction of the state, leaving the exact record of the units unclear.²⁶ Bureaucracy would not stand in the way of volunteer enlistment in northwest Louisiana. Even after the Confederate government advised on May 15, 1861 that all volunteers would be required to muster for the duration of the war, volunteering continued with “such enthusiasm” as “I never witnessed . . . at any time prior to this.” As Alfred Flournoy recounted to his enlisted son, Caddo and its residents were “fully aroused to the dangers that threaten us.” With commitment to the Confederacy translating into high enlistment rates, many parishes were soon depleted of fighting aged men. Flournoy observed that after successful rounds of enlistment, “almost our entire fighting population is gone. Our parish is now one of

²⁴ John Houston to “Friend William,” September 29, 1861, William M. Allen Correspondence, Mss. 2287, 701, LLMVC. For a complete list of Louisiana’s military units see “Louisiana Units,” *LHQ* 4 (January 1921). A sampling of Red River units in addition to the Coushatta Rifles and Pelican Rifles included: Bossier Cavalry, Bossier Volunteers, Bossier Rangers Volunteers, Caddo Confederates, Caddo Company, Caddo Fencibles, Caddo Lake Boys, Caddo Light Horse, Caddo Militia, Caddo Pioneers, Caddo Rifles, Caddo 10th and 19th Infantry, DeSoto Blue, DeSoto Creoles, DeSoto Rangers, DeSoto Rifles, Dixie Rebels, Henry Marshall Guards, Keachi Warriors, Natchitoches Rebels, Natchitoches Rifles, Natchitoches Cavalry Co, Natchitoches Mounted Guards, North Louisiana Cadets, Raceland Guards, Rapides Rangers, Rapides Invincibles, Rapides Rangers, Rapides Terribles, Rapides Tigers, Red River Rebels, Red River Scouts, Red River Sharpshooters, Shreveport Greys, Shreveport Rangers, Shreveport Rebels and the Shreveport Rifles. However, since the Confederate state never kept official records, lists of mustered units differ. For a list of units from Caddo Parish see: Lilla McClure and J. Ed Howe, *The History of Shreveport and Shreveport Builders* (Shreveport: J. Ed Howe, 1937). For details on Rapides Parish see: G. P. Whittington, “The History of Rapides Parish,” *LHQ* 16 (1933): 427–440. For information about mustering units in northern Louisiana and particulars about units see Powell Casey, “Confederate Units from North Louisiana,” *NLHJ* 6 (Spring 1975): 105–115.

²⁵ Alfred Flournoy, Sr. to Alfred Flournoy, Jr., March 16, 1862, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC.

²⁶ Casey, “Confederate Units from North Louisiana,” 112; George Marion-Landais, “The Alfred Flournoy, Jr. Letters to Theodosia, His Wife, 1861,” *NLHJ* 28 (Spring/Summer 1997): 92–93.

the most defenseless portions of the world. All our arms and all our men are gone.”²⁷ In the cotton parishes, less than a month after the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter, H.G. Hargis declared “the people arose as one man.”²⁸

The enthusiasm for the Confederate call to arms was potent because southern whites, and particularly slaveholders, felt that the Confederacy best served their personal interests and better protected their families. For them, the Confederacy and the Confederate cause was “most in tune with their individual needs and aspirations.”²⁹ Like numerous other families from the Red River settler generation, the Flournoy family became thoroughly enmeshed in Louisiana’s military contribution to the new Confederate nation. William Flournoy, brother to Alfred, founded the Greenwood Guards for service as Company 1 in the Second Regiment of Louisiana Volunteers. The Greenwood Guards was one of nineteen state commissioned units that left Caddo Parish for service during the first year of the war. Volunteer units, of which there were plenty, generally were recruited for transfer to Confederate service. Units that entered the service of the state only, like the Greenwood Guards, fell under the jurisdiction of Confederate officers by order of the Louisiana governor. This volunteer regiment, along with the Shreveport Greys and the Caddo Rifles, was mustered within one month after the fall of Fort Sumter and remained in service for the duration, engaged in most every major battle. The latter two units departed Shreveport on April 16, 1861—four days after the bombardment at Fort Sumter—amid great fanfare.³⁰ In a letter to his son Alfred, Jr., who was in the service of the Greenwood Guards, Alfred underscored the soldiers’ fervent commitment to protect home and hearth. If William and Alfred Jr. and their “noble greenwood guards, who were among the first to leave their homes to drive back the invader of their country, were to return from the face of the enemy they would feel ashamed to walk amongst the old men of their parish and find all their young friends gone to the war.” Southern honor intertwined with a soldier’s attachment to family and home to both buoy enlistment and imbued service with deep significance. As Flournoy made clear, “no company in the service stands higher in the estimation of their countrymen.”³¹ The Greenwood Guards were not alone in gaining such accolades. Across the country, locally

²⁷ Casey, “Confederate Units from North Louisiana,” 106; Alfred Flournoy, Sr. to Alfred Flournoy, Jr., March 16, 1862, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC. Casey notes that regiments often ended up with a mixture of 12 month and “for the duration” companies.

²⁸ H.G. Hargis to W.B. Benson, May 15, 1861, Benson Family Papers, Mss. 2424, 2440, LLMVC.

²⁹ Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (NY: Knopf, 2007), 31. For a discussion about north Louisiana’s early commitment to the war, especially Bossier Parish, see Rupert Peyton, “The Civil War Began and Ended in North Louisiana,” *NLHJ* 7 (Winter 1976): 75–77.

³⁰ Casey, “Confederate Units from North Louisiana,” 107. To trace the route of a particular company, *Index of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* is a useful resource. For more details about the Greenwood Guards, the Shreveport Greys, and the Caddo Rifles see Terry Jones, “Shreveport Goes to War: Soldiers’ Views, 1861–1862,” *LH* 25 (Autumn 1984): 391–401. The Shreveport Greys were dispatched to Pensacola, Florida for a twelve-month service as part of the First Louisiana Battalion. The Caddo Rifles and Greenwood Guards were inducted into the army, the former joined the First Louisiana Volunteers and the latter the Second Louisiana.

³¹ Alfred Flournoy, Jr. to Alfred Flournoy, Sr., March 16, 1862, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC. For additional studies that discuss feelings toward enlistment and sectional commitment see: Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*; Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2005); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: HUP, 2010); Quigley, *Shifting Grounds*; Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1988).

recruited units emerged, often to the acclaim of residents who derived pride and enthusiasm for the war effort from the service of their Confederate soldiers.

Enlistment was one of the most visible aspects of a Confederate nationalism. It “prescribed change in the service of continuity” and it also comprised an enormous portion of a nationalistic ideology based on white male unity. C. B. “Brack” Johnson, married to Louisiana Powell, the daughter of William Powell of Mount Flat and Slate Place Plantations, received many letters from friends enthusing about military enrollment. Brack had not volunteered by the fall of 1861 and an enlisted friend raising an infantry company wrote to implore him to join “for three years or the war, expect to complete it soon.” His friend remarked that his wife was not pleased about his enlistment but “better to meet the enemy at the threshold than to wait for him to penetrate the breach of the country.”³² Commitment to hearth and home was not unique among north Louisiana volunteers but this deep sense of allegiance to the Confederacy along with the fervent desire to protect the Red River region from invasion flourished and remained strong throughout the war. It resulted in continued efforts to raise companies despite already strong volunteering and conscription rates throughout the parishes. Louisiana, as Brack’s friend mused, had “responded nobly” and especially Caddo, and “more are willing to go.” This abiding bond with the Confederate cause and allegiance “almost from the moment of its creation” to the new Confederate nation inspired loyalty and commitment from its citizens.³³ This loyalty was echoed in Brack’s own letters home from the battlefield to his wife, Louisiana Powell, and in the letter of Natchitoches area resident David Pierson. Pierson, like Brack, understood he would be fighting for a long duration and did not join to “gratify an ambition.” Instead, like countless other men from the Red River parishes, he fought “in the defense of our common country and homes which is threatened with invasion and annihilation.” Pierson had initially been against secession, but the subsequent decision of Louisiana and her southern sisters to secede marked a sea change in his political stance and his loyalty to Louisiana and the South. As was true of most of his Louisiana brethren, Pierson believed that secession presented two alternatives, “to take up arms against the south or in her defense.” Committed northern Louisianans like Pierson were “not slow to choose” and once committed, they quickly devoted themselves and their futures to a “sacrifice which destiny impels every patriot to make at the alter of his country’s glory.”³⁴

John Houston encapsulated the sentiments of his fellow slaveholders and Southerners when he identified Lincoln’s election and the “no compromise” policy of the new Federal

³² Letter to “Dear Brack,” October 13, 1861, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Brack and Louisiana Powell were married before the Civil War. Brack would join in 1862 and died in 1863 near Chattanooga. Hubbard Bosley, husband of Powell’s daughter Mary, would serve as a member of the 8th Louisiana Cavalry in the Young Greys. According to his death certificate, he was a prisoner of war, paroled at Shreveport on June 20, 1865. He is buried in Coushatta, and his tombstone states “Proud Confederate Soldier” underneath his company listing. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=14035533>.

³³ Letter to “Dear Brack,” October 13, 1861, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC; Rubin, *Shattered Nation*, 12.

³⁴ David Pierson to “Dear Father,” April 21, 1861, David Pierson Letter, Mss. 1612, LLMVC. Brack discusses his commitment to the Confederate fight in C.B. Johnson to “Dear Wife,” April 27, 1862, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

government as the moment that Southerners “drew our swords and placed them upon the altar of our country and pledged our lives, property and sacred honor” to the protection of the South “from the bondage of the north.”³⁵ He also described the sensibilities and inclinations of the region’s women. With the parishes drained of fighting age men, women took charge of the plantations, the management of slaves, and cotton cultivation. Dosia Williams Moore recalled that the women “were all ardent rebels.”³⁶ Female dedication and involvement in the Confederate cause is clearly displayed in the Red River region by an enthusiasm for the war effort that mirrored that of their male kin. Women, and most especially slaveholding women, throughout the Confederacy displayed their nationalism through a framework that drew upon pre-war notions of femininity and family honor. At the onset of the war, this manifested itself in outpourings of public support for the war. Brack Johnson’s sister, studying at Wesleyan Female College in Macon, Georgia, wrote to him in Caddo two weeks after Fort Sumter. Her letter overflowed with excitement for the war, earnest nationalism, and profuse determination. She contrasted the “prevailing excitement in our city is war” with the profound sadness surely to be felt by families after “five hundred men left macon last week” for Virginia.³⁷ Even in the early days of war, she indicated how southern women might sacrifice their personal feelings for the “abstract and intangible ‘Cause.’”³⁸ As mothers, sisters, lovers, and daughters parted from the newly enlisted, Ms. Johnson’s testament that “every day some of the girls fathers stop” en route to war for a last farewell “perhaps forever” underscores the sacrificial element of Confederate nationalism.³⁹ The theme of sacrifice reverberated strongly on Red River plantations a year later. William Chase, master of Chaseland plantation along the Red, wrote his daughter to relay how personal deprivation would be for the ultimate benefit of the South. Acknowledging his comfortable living situation heretofore, Chase thanked “the good cause of secession and the present noble struggle for our defense of the confederate states” for teaching him how little in the way of material possessions and comforts was necessary. Chase closely related his individual forfeit of comfortable amenities with political and military consequences because he

³⁵ John Houston to “Friend William,” September 29, 1861, William M. Allen Correspondence, Mss. 2287, 701, LLMVC.

³⁶ Wells, *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River*, 18.

³⁷ Letter to “My Darling Brother,” April 29, 1861, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Wesleyan Female College was opened in 1839 in Macon, Georgia. It still exists as a private, liberal arts women’s college. Letters, particularly those sent by the women who remained on the home front, were used by Confederate men and women to assert their citizenship and craft their identity throughout the duration of the war. Quigley, *Shifting Grounds* indicates that these themes of male duty appeared in everyday writings of southerners because they were a source of encouragement to fulfill the duties of citizenship and also a clear warning of the consequences of shirking (193). Faust asserts that in the latter years of the war, women used letters to voice dissent and urge desertion, however none of the sources in this work utilized letters in this fashion. See Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1996), 238–242.

³⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War,” *JAH* 76 (March 1990): 1209. Faust investigates Southern women, Confederate nationalism, and the effects of defeat on them in her work *Mothers of Invention*, where she asserts that elite women invented new identities that were designed in large measure to resist change. Ultimately, this resistance to change helped to reinforce a Southern female identity based on an antebellum ideal and created the conservative construction of postwar feminism. George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Champaign: UIP, 1989) reaches a similar conclusion. He argues that the destruction in the South made most elite women cling to antebellum social distinctions and that the cultural contest happening during the war ended in a triumph for the old South that reinforced traditional gender definitions. For an examination of the link between conservative womanhood and masculinity during Reconstruction see LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860–1890* (Athens: UGA, 1995). See also Catherine Clinton and Nina Sibley, eds., *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (NY: OUP, 1992).

³⁹ Letter to “My Darling Brother,” April 29, 1861, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

declared the abnegation worthwhile in respect to “how amply our people . . . will be compensated for present sacrifices by the good in store for us!” Chase continued to write letters of a similar ilk to his daughter throughout the year. He utilized pioneer imagery to strengthen the revolutionary and sacred nature—akin to the “french and other great revolutions”—of the Confederate cause.⁴⁰ In the Red River, as elsewhere across the South, planters and their families believed in individual and collective sacrifice to the Confederacy. They remained committed to the war and felt that like their Revolutionary era forefathers, their armed kinsmen were engaged in a battle to protect liberty.

Female contributions to the Confederacy included a traditionally feminine remit of emotional support and the production of clothing and provisions. Red River women fiercely committed to this “domestic patriotism.” Elite, slaveholding women undertook clothing the men in grey, extending the patriotic female sacrifice from strictly benefiting family to encompass all Confederate soldiers.⁴¹ Sidney Harding, who fled from her family’s plantation in southern Louisiana to their Keachi, DeSoto Parish holding in late 1863, knitted items for particular officers stationed in Shreveport. She also visited at the hospitals around Mansfield along with female relations and friends, particularly in the wake of the Battle of Mansfield in April 1864.⁴² Alfred Flournoy, Jr. and his wife Theodosia not only kept up a regular correspondence but she actively involved herself in a sewing society dedicated to the support of all members of Alfred’s—and her uncle-in-law, William’s—Greenwood Guards.⁴³ Although the war opened up the possibility for the expansion of women’s roles, the decidedly traditional parameters of these opportunities enforced antebellum gender roles. This, in turn, quietly underscored the commitment to slavery and social order, including gender relations, as a crucial component of the Confederacy.⁴⁴ Though they were not allowed to enroll to fight, a great number of Red River women voiced in their correspondence the wish to be of more use to the Confederacy. Indeed, for some women, the Civil War unleashed a revolution in gender values and nowhere more so than in feelings of hatred toward northern men. In a plucky letter, Brack Johnson’s sister enumerated the steps she was taking to fight the Union. She had decided to learn how to shoot so “if the Yankees whip our men the ladies will be ready to take their place.” She took

⁴⁰ William Henry Chase to Annie Chase, February 10, March 3, 1862, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC. Punctuation in original. Annie Chase’s mother, Anne, died in 1863 and her grandfather was Judge George Mathews. William Chase resided at Chaseland and Coco Bend during the war. McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*, 204.

⁴¹ Giselle Roberts, “The Confederate Belle: The Belle Ideal, Patriotic Womanhood, and Wartime Reality in Louisiana and Mississippi, 1861–1865,” *LH* 43 (Spring 2002): 195, 198; Kristen Forrester, “Disrupting the Domestic Sphere: The Civil War and North Louisiana Women, 1861–1865,” *NLHJ* 26 (Winter 1995): 36–54. See also John Anderson, ed., *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861–1868* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1995). Elite women clothed soldiers with the unacknowledged labor and weaving skills of their female slaves. For discussion of this see Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 113.

⁴² Miss Sidney Harding Diaries, Mss. 721, LLMVC. A flighty twenty-three year old, Harding disliked giving aid or nursing unattractive soldiers. The Battle of Mansfield took place on April 8, 1864.

⁴³ Theodosia Flournoy to Alfred Flournoy, Jr., July 22, 1861, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC. Marion-Landais, “The Alfred Flournoy, Jr. Letters to Theodosia, His Wife, 1861”: 92–118 provides a transcribed and annotated version of the letters.

⁴⁴ Quigley, *Shifting Grounds*, 195; Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*, 3–4. Rubin elucidates the significance of the silences in Southern and Confederate letters. Slavery was clearly critical to the Confederacy and was given pride of place in the constitution, yet “private expression of national identity, as well as public exhortations aimed at nation-building, all but ignored the question of racial slavery.” For them, slavery was a given and not up for discussion.

additional consolation that “the ladies of the southern confederacy can lash any yankee with their tong” while she bemoaned that the fine Confederate men “have to fight such a degrading set of northerners.” Then she declared that she hoped Washington and “old abe” would be the first burned. Her loyalty to the CSA was irrefutable and Northern aggression—evinced by Lincoln’s call for volunteers—stirred a new “feeling of revenge” and resulted in the declaration: “I never would be contented until I killed a yankee.”⁴⁵

Slaveholding women, and those planters not serving, continued the cultivation of cotton, and thus the race-based power structure of slave labor remained unbroken and unchallenged. The relative isolation afforded by the Red River played a crucial role in the sustained enforcement of slavery throughout northwest Louisiana. The river had been altered and somewhat mastered by the engineering work of Shreve and later teams of the Army Corps, however, the river had not been wholly controlled and its indomitable nature served as a protector to the verdant region extending from its banks. In 1862, the Mississippi and the Red flooded in “one of the greatest floods which ever occurred.”⁴⁶ This flood effectively sealed off the region and made it impenetrable by water to an amphibious invasion by Union forces. Planter Charles Mathews wrote an anxious letter to his overseer in July 1862 with instructions regarding the “necessity of putting the levee in good fix before we have high water.” He was certain the river “will come down with a rush” and to protect the fields and his home he ordered “as many hands as can work at it and do it quickly” to throw up a levee by the house and make a cross levee.⁴⁷ High water inundated croplands but the river and the moving morass of the Raft hermetically sealed this region from the extreme devastation of the war experienced in the battle-worn areas of the Confederacy. The protection afforded by the impassable Red allowed life in the area to continue in much the same manner as before the war and, most significantly, with the power dynamics of slavery uncontested. The impregnable river created a geographic barrier that enforced the non-defeatist attitude of the regional slaveholders.

The hermetically sealed Red River region provided a safe haven for the Confederacy and an obstacle to Union military plans. New Orleans came under Union control on April 24, 1862 and effectively bifurcated Louisiana into the Union occupied southern portion of the state, which reached as far north as Baton Rouge and westward to Bayou LaFourche and Bayou Teche, and the Confederate state of Louisiana extending to the north.⁴⁸ As the epicenter of the Confederate state, Shreveport took on an increasingly important role as the war progressed. Shreveport became the capital of Louisiana in January of 1863, with Governor Thomas Overton Moore and subsequently Henry Watkins Allen serving their gubernatorial terms from the city. Additionally, Shreveport was made the headquarters of the Confederate Trans-Mississippi West

⁴⁵ Faust, “Altars of Sacrifice”; Letter to “My Darling Brother,” April 29, 1861, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁶ Gould, *Fifty Years on the Mississippi*, 259.

⁴⁷ Charles Mathews to J.A. Shultz, July 26, 1862, Charles L. Mathews Family Papers, Mss. 910, LLMVC.

⁴⁸ Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863–1877* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1974), 4–5.

Department, under the command of General Edmund Kirby Smith in early 1863.⁴⁹ The river was impenetrable by Union ironclads in 1862–1863 but it was navigable upstream from within the confines of the Confederate state, and so the Red River provided the Confederate forces fighting east of the Mississippi with beef and supplies. Thousands of longhorn cattle were driven “both up and down Red River Valley to Shreveport,” where they were butchered and shipped down river in boats revived and repaired for service.⁵⁰ In addition to providing beef for the Confederate army, Shreveport served as a relatively busy trading nexus and a center of industry. The Federal naval blockade of New Orleans made trade difficult and goods hard to access. Shreveport, however, could readily acquire goods from Texas and Mexico and it became a trade center for items such as coffee, whiskey, flour, sugar, meat, and other supplies at reasonable prices. In 1861 and 1862 there was no shortage of food in north Louisiana, since food crop cultivation continued, though this would not remain the case for the remainder of the war. Nancy Willard, a small slaveholder in Bossier Parish, wrote a friend in Mississippi that “the Blockade is doing us no harm up here for Boats cant come any where near us but we have plenty of meat and bread and milk and rye coffee.”⁵¹ Shreveport also supported and instituted a manufacturing industry to supplement the dearth of manufactured goods otherwise available within the Confederacy. Two shops made and repaired firearms and a tannery opened along with a shoe factory that produced civilian and military footwear in 1861. By the spring of 1864 Shreveport had a thriving war-based industry that effectively provided for most civilian and military needs, ranging from food to medicine, within the Confederacy. Indeed, the city, and the region as a whole, had to be self-sufficient.⁵²

Governor Allen and General Kirby Smith both used the protected bastion provided by Shreveport to supply the Confederate state and army. Allen established a system of state stores, foundries, and factories; Smith set up the same through the Ordinance Bureau to manufacture ammunition. These factories produced up to ten thousand rounds per day for small arms and lesser quantities for artillery. Allen also erected state laboratories to manufacture turpentine, castor oil, carbonate of soda, and medicinal alcohol. Mount Lebanon Female College and a hundred newly purchased acres in Bienville Parish cultivated and turned out turpentine, whiskey, castor oil, and a “good grade of opium made from native wild poppies,” for anaesthetic and pain management. Quinine and additional medicinal drugs were brought in from

⁴⁹ For additional information see John D. Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1963); B.H. Gilley, ed., *North Louisiana, Volume One: To 1865 Essays on the Region and Its History* (Ruston: McGinty Trust Fund Publications, 1984); M. Scott Legan, “Drugs for Louisiana: The Louisiana State Laboratory, 1864–1865,” *LH* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 193–202.

⁵⁰ Harry Sinclair Drago, *Red River Valley: The Mainstream of Frontier History from the Louisiana Bayous to the Texas Panhandle* (NY: Clarkson Potter, 1962), 103. Drago notes that in 1862 the Confederate Congress exempted cattlemen from military service at the rate of one man for each five hundred head of cattle and that by 1863, cattle were going for twenty-five dollars a head. Prices soared as high as sixty dollars a head, leading to attempts to swim herds across the Mississippi, but the losses proved great and this idea was aborted.

⁵¹ Nancy and Dustin Willard to Micajah; Mary Wilkinson, January 20, 1862, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Mss. 707, LLMVC.

⁵² Gilley, *North Louisiana*, 166, 180; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 321; Gary Joiner, *One Damn Blunder From Beginning to End: The Red River Campaign of 1864* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 17.

Mexico and Keachi Female College served as a depot for some of these medical supplies.⁵³ Allen's deep concern about the lack of medicine for civilians and soldiers led to the passage of Legislative Act 70 on February 11, 1864, and allowed Allen to appoint a skilled druggist and apothecary as superintendent. Under the authority of this act facilities were built at Mount Lebanon Female College that served as the state laboratory staffed by a machinist, skilled workers—many of them infirm soldiers, a chemist, castor oil manufacturer, a distiller, a potter, two coopers, a turpentine overseer, and twenty-nine impressed male slaves from local plantations. Other individuals at the laboratory and the environs grew medicinal herbs. This state laboratory successfully cultivated turpentine, alcohol, pure whiskey, castor oil, morphine, and opium, however they were unable to create a substitute for much needed quinine.⁵⁴

Allen and Smith additionally made arrangements to ship cotton and sugar that had been collected as Confederate tax-in-kind to Mexico, where it was swapped for shoes, machinery, dry goods, and any necessities that could not be manufactured on Louisiana soil.⁵⁵ Smith also encouraged manufacturing and founded government industries around his Shreveport headquarters as well as in Texas and Arkansas. These factories supplied ten thousand pairs of shoes a month to the army and an equal number of hats and caps per month.⁵⁶ The existent salt works in Bossier, Bienville, and Winn parishes increased production. Salt was a scarce and coveted item in the Confederacy and high demand ensured that profits were immediate for those possessing salt licks and desiccating facilities. D. Y. Milling, a soldier from Bossier Parish, wrote to his brother about the advantages of selling salt. Laid up in a convalescent camp in Little Rock, Milling told his brother that salt used by the army was going for thirty to forty dollars a barrel and coming from Bossier. He advised his brother to either make salt for the government—using their slaves to increase production—or to secure a government salt contract. If the latter case worked out, Milling desired to help his brother with this salt production and requested, “to attend to the hands or in some part of the work.”⁵⁷ Henry Winbourne Drake fled his Tensas Parish plantation with his family and slaves and refugeed in Bienville Parish for the last two years of the war. He also seized the opportunity presented by salt demand and hired out all his male slaves to work in the salt works at Lake Bistineau. After the seizure of the Avery Island salt mines in southern Louisiana, these salt works were the largest and most important in

⁵³ Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 318–319; Gilley, *North Louisiana*, 180; <http://www.desotoisdifferent.org/keachi.html>. Mount Lebanon College and Keachi Female College were used as Confederate hospitals after the Battle of Mansfield, as was Henry Marshall's Land's End plantation.

⁵⁴ Legan, “Drugs for Louisiana,” 193–202. The opium was derived from local white poppies. A bottle of whiskey could be sold for as much as \$150 in parts of the Confederacy and the availability of it in the Shreveport area did lead to some alcohol-fueled crime. For discussions of sickness, medical treatment, and death see Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (NY: Vintage, 2008) and Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During The Civil War and Reconstruction* (NY: OUP, 2012). The latter monograph excellently handles the impact of disease and lack of medical care, attention, and humanitarian aid to the black death toll in the Civil War, particularly in the aftermath of the Emancipation Proclamation, and Reconstruction.

⁵⁵ Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 318–319.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 321. One factory was in Shreveport, four in Texan towns, and one in an Arkansas town.

⁵⁷ D.Y. Milling to Jas Milling, January 10, 1863, D.Y. Milling Letters, Mss. 3758, LLMVC; Gilley, *North Louisiana*, 180.

northwest Louisiana.⁵⁸ In effect, the high waters of the Red River and the unpredictable Raft quarantined northwest Louisiana, which allowed it to be utilized advantageously by the Confederate state and army, and cemented Shreveport's indisputable importance to the Confederacy.

The flooded Red River also presented an environmental factor that altered the course of Union military plans. With the river too high to implement any amphibious campaign, General Nathaniel Banks had to defer plans to invade the region until 1864. This ill-fated campaign had originally been slated for late 1862 or early 1863, but the river made the cotton rich Red River valley inaccessible. The original Banks expedition of 1862 was essentially a proposal to conquer Texas and a key feature of this military plan was entry into Texas via the Red, with an invasion staged from the northern border of Louisiana.⁵⁹ The invasion and possession of Texas and northwest Louisiana remained the focus of Union strategy in the Red River. The Red River nonetheless remained a source of consternation for Banks throughout his tenure in Louisiana. In August 1863, Banks indicated the importance of the Red River to the Confederacy and its possible use by the Confederates as a retreat option. Two months later, he detailed the strategic issues presented by the Red in a letter to Major General Halleck. Foreshadowing his plans for the Red River campaign months later, Banks remarked, "the importance of Shreveport, as represented, is very great." As the Union general well understood, access to the Red remained difficult and his troops had been unable to move north of Alexandria. His knowledge of the mouth of the Red came from Admiral David Porter, who reported "that the mouth of the Red River... are hermetically sealed to his vessels by almost dry sandbars." After flooding in 1862, the river level plummeted in 1863, and the river had not been "so low for 50 years."⁶⁰ The river would prove to be a deciding factor in the outcome of the Union-led Red River campaign and its mercurial nature continued to plague the Union army and limit the wartime devastation experienced by the region's inhabitants. Crucially, it also ensured that slavery continue to operate virtually untouched by the dislocation of the Civil War. Few parts of the South were as isolated as the Red River and, in contrast to other regions where mass flight and resistance increasingly led to the dissolution of plantation authority, racial bondage and plantation agriculture endured.

The protection the Red River afforded the region allowed slaveholders to continue cotton cultivation alongside foodstuffs. This unbroken arc of cotton cultivation provided the Confederacy with supplies of white gold that the CSA used to purchase goods for the war effort

⁵⁸ W. Magruder Drake and H. Winbourne Drake, "Two Letters of H. Winbourne Drake, Civil War Refugee in Northwest Louisiana," *LH* 7 (Winter 1966): 75. For the role of salt in the Confederacy see Ella Lonn, *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy* (NY: Walter Neale, 1933). Salt and salt production also played a significant role in southwest Georgia, an area that was similarly protected by dint of geography. In that instance, slaveholders and white southerners descended on the Florida panhandle, where shanty camps were established and where slaves condensed seawater into salt. See O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 91.

⁵⁹ For an in-depth investigation see George Winston Smith, "The Banks Expedition of 1862," *LHQ* 26 (April 1943): 339–360.

⁶⁰ Nathaniel Banks to U.S. Grant, August 28, 1863; Nathaniel Banks to Major General Halleck, October 15, 1863, Nathaniel P. Banks Letter Book, Mss. 2326, LLMVC.

from the onset of the conflict. Cotton turned into foreign exchange used to purchase supplies from Mexico and Texas for military consumption, thereby circumventing the Federal blockade of southern imports and exports.⁶¹ Early in the summer of 1861, the Confederate Treasury Department implored planters to pledge portions of the proceeds of their fall cotton sales, and many planters subscribed to this produce loan. When the Union blockade tightened trade, the government issued the loan bonds in return for the physical cotton, which remained in storage on the plantations. With most East Coast and Gulf region cotton embargoed by the blockade, Northern Louisiana's cotton was hugely important to the war effort and allowed the Confederacy to pledge it as security for loans in Europe. With Confederate money depreciating as wartime inflation collapsed, the cotton's gold value of over \$8 million represented real assets.⁶² Thus, the wealth held in cotton also made blockade running very profitable. Shipping receipts from a Shreveport factor indicate that cotton was sold for ten cents a pound in 1862. In August 1863, the Confederacy could buy cotton between eight and ten cents a pound and then sell it to France at fifty-four cents a pound. It was one cent more per pound the following year while it sold for over fifty cents a pound in London.⁶³ When General Smith established his headquarters in Shreveport, he also instated a Cotton Bureau, which reported the purchase of over 80,000 bales of cotton in Louisiana, with the overwhelming majority of that cotton from Red River plantations. In 1863, 28,505 bales had been purchased at Shreveport, with 10,602 of those shipped to Texas to procure supplies from Mexico, and over 12,556 bales stored near Natchitoches.⁶⁴ The Cotton Bureau, run by former New Orleans cotton factor William Broadwell, attempted to preserve the existing supplies of government cotton from the Union while acquiring more cotton to purchase supplies. To that end, a system of wagon caravans traversed northern Louisiana to haul cotton into Texas.⁶⁵ Irrespective of the failure of the Confederacy's cotton diplomacy and European cotton and textile manufacturers' transition to Asian suppliers, cotton remained significant during the Civil War and with vast cotton fields largely undisturbed by war, the Red River region continued to play a vital role in the southern economy and the Confederate cause.

Cotton accordingly proved extremely valuable to the Confederate army despite the difficulties civilians and the CSA would face in selling cotton with the embargo, both groups wanted to protect cotton fields and the cultivated crop. One year into the war, Alfred Flournoy

⁶¹ Judith Gentry, "White Gold: Confederate Government and Cotton in Louisiana," *LH* 33 (Summer 1992): 229–230; Gilley, *North Louisiana*, 166; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*.

⁶² Gentry, "White Gold," 230; Stanley Lebergott, "Through the Blockade: The Profitability and Extent of Cotton Smuggling, 1861–1865," *JEH* 41 (December 1981): 868. For details on the Produce Loan, see Judith Gentry, "A Confederate Success in Europe: The Erlanger Loan," *JSH* 36, (1970): 157–188.

⁶³ A.M. Hull and Co. Warehouse Shipping Receipts, March 14, 1862, C.C. Gaines and Company Papers, Mss. 3403, LLMVC; Lebergott, "Through the Blockade," 868. Blockade running was a source of consternation for the Union. For a primary source, see Nathaniel Banks to Abraham Lincoln, December 18, 1863, Nathaniel P. Banks Letter Book, Mss. 2326, LLMVC. This letter is one of numerous instances that discussed the issue of allowing the rebels any sort of commercial advantage. In this letter, Banks states "we may find that the munitions of war furnished to the rebels and the pirates that prey upon our commerce may be paid for and supported by rebel products passing through our hands to the markets of the world."

⁶⁴ Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*, 321–322.

⁶⁵ Gentry, "White Gold," 233.

wrote his son Alfred, Jr. about the scarcity and high value of money. He assured his son, who was serving in the Greenwood Guards, that corn and cotton cultivation continued on the plantation although only “one man in fifty has the money to pay his taxes.” The paucity of money, which echoes sentiments found in D.Y. Milling’s letters, underscored the importance of slave grown cotton as income. Indeed, as Flourney, Sr. remarked, “everything depends on cotton.”⁶⁶ The lack of disposable funds coupled with poor access to money, credit, and the difficulty of selling cotton intensified civilian frustrations. Flournoy expressed his exasperation with this conundrum when he wrote, “cotton now cannot be sold at any price. All the necessities of life are scarce and high and cannot be purchased except with money.” Similar feelings were espoused by Nancy Willard, who wrote “monney is scarce and every thing sells hie.”⁶⁷ The programs instituted in 1863 by Governor Allen and General Smith offered greater recourse to sell cotton, which somewhat eased hardships, and also provided the region’s white inhabitants with a platform to request assistance and provisions from the Confederacy.

Despite these hardships, Red River slaveholders were loathe to sell their cotton to the enemy but equally resolved to prevent it falling into Federal hands. If they were unable to sell the cotton to the Confederacy, these slaveholders preferred direct sales at a depreciated rate or to burn their cotton. In 1863, William Hutchinson received word from his factor that he had sold some of Hutchinson’s store of cotton at a decreased price because “it was the best I could do.”⁶⁸ William Benson’s overseer received a letter from their factors at Mansfield that stated, “in case the necessities of war should compel the destruction of cotton, then as a matter of course, the sale will be thereby cancelled.”⁶⁹ Burning cotton to prevent Union seizure was the preferred method in Bossier Parish, as indicated by Nancy Willard. Willard, who remained optimistic about the fate of the South, wrote in mid-1862 that those planters who had sent their cotton crops to warehouses had “given order to have it burnt if the Yankees should come up here.”⁷⁰ These choices for the disposal of this white gold reflected the enmity with which Lincoln’s administration was held and the deep attachment to the Confederacy shared by the regional slaveholders. With a bountiful crop harvested in late 1863–1864, a bequest of the fine weather, tens of thousands of bales sat on the banks of the Red awaiting shipment southward. Additional cotton reserves were still growing, which added further incentive for the capture of Shreveport

⁶⁶ Alfred Flournoy, Sr. to Alfred Flournoy, Jr., March 16, 1862, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC; D.Y. Milling to Jas Milling, January 10, 1863, D.Y. Milling Letters, Mss. 3758, LLMVC.

⁶⁷ Alfred Flournoy, Sr. to Alfred Flournoy, Jr., March 16, 1862, Alfred Flournoy Papers, Mss. 628, LLMVC; Nancy and Dustin Willard to Micajah and Nancy Wilkinson, January 20, 1862, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Mss. 707, LLMVC.

⁶⁸ J.R. Moore to William Hutchinson, August 8, 186X (unclear), William Joseph Hutchinson Family and Plantation Records, Collection 075, LSUS.

⁶⁹ A.J. Rugley & Co to W.G. Hale, July 8, 1862, Benson Family Papers, Mss. 2424, 2440, LLMVC.

⁷⁰ Nancy Willard to Micajah and Nancy Wilkinson, May 15, 1862, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Mss. 707, LLMVC.

by the Union army.⁷¹ The acquisition of cotton was thus a prime motivating factor—alongside the invasion of Texas and capture of Shreveport—behind the ill-fated Red River campaign.⁷²

While the cultivation of cotton continued, slaveholders in northwest Louisiana discussed slaves and slavery only when necessary. Indeed, discussion of slavery and of slaves in the letters of Red River residents remained sparse. In part, this was because racial slavery formed a cornerstone of the Confederacy and thus discussion or argument about it proved needless. The rich reservoir of nationalistic imagery bequeathed to the Confederacy downplayed the importance of slavery while spotlighting virtue, faith, and the constitutional states' rights of Southerners. Also, since the correspondence of private Confederates tended to echo the contours of public Confederate sources, letters between servicemen and kin on the home front did not focus on the machinations of slavery.⁷³ For slaveholders on the Red River, discussions about slavery revolved around how their slaves were employed, the expense of slaves as supplies became scarcer, or what to do with their slave population, especially as the war progressed. A letter to Hubbard Bosley from his sister details the frustrations typical of the small to mid-sized slaveholder. She had limited access to cloth and “no one to help me spin but lelora and she a slow chance.” The one suit of clothing given to slaves now had to be homespun alongside the cloth needed by white family members, a permutation that made doling out minimal slave provisions more arduous. Coupled with the problem of clothing and feeding her “six darkies” in addition to herself and her children were the limited opportunities for hiring them out. Bosley’s sister wanted to follow antebellum precedent and hire as many slaves out as possible to pay expenses and felt sure that at very the least “Primas and Horis labor ought to pay our board.”⁷⁴ The difficulty she faced finding a plantation to hire her slaves was part and parcel of the isolated nature of the region, the scarcity of cash, and the effect of the blockade on trade. Similar frustrations faced Elizabeth Samford Fullilove on her larger holding. Though her plantation continued to utilize the labor of fifty slaves, “there was nothing to buy” and so all clothing and previously purchased sundries had to be made “from the place.” She recounted in her journal

⁷¹ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder*, 3–4.

⁷² Cotton seizure and the importance of cotton as a motivating factor for the Union army and navy, as well as individuals such as Admiral Porter and General Banks, is a key feature of the literature on the Red River Campaign. For treatment of this issue see: Ludwell Johnson, *Red River Campaign: Politics and Cotton in the Civil War* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993); Joiner, *One Damn Blunder*; Joiner, *Through the Howling Wilderness: The 1864 Red River Campaign and Union Failure in the West* (Knoxville: UTNP, 2006); William Riley Brooksher, *War Along the Bayous: The 1864 Red River Campaign in Louisiana* (Washington: Brassey’s, 1998); Thomas Ayers, *Dark and Bloody Ground: The Battle of Mansfield and the Forgotten Civil War in Louisiana* (Dallas: Taylor Trade, 2001); Curt Anders, *Disaster in Damp Sand: The Red River Expedition* (Indianapolis: Guild Press of Indiana, 1997); Michael Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864 and the Loss by the Confederacy of the Civil War* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2002); Myron Smith, Jr., *Tinclads in the Civil War: Union Light-Draught Gunboat Operations on Western Waters, 1862–1865* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2010); Robert Kerby, *Kirby Smith’s Confederacy: The Trans-Mississippi South, 1863–1865* (NY: COUP, 1972); Michael Thomas Smith, ““For Love of Cotton”: Nathaniel P. Banks, Union Strategy, and the Red River Campaign,” *LH* 51 (Winter 2010): 5–26.

⁷³ Rubin, *Shattered Nation*, 13, 18, 117. The exemption of slavery from the nationalistic rhetoric was also used to unify all white Southerners, especially the non-slaveholders and yeomen. See Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism and Manning, What This Cruel War Was Over*. However, though there was much discussion throughout the South and in personal correspondence about the 20 slave exemption law making the war a rich men’s war but a poor man’s fight, no letters to that effect from the Red River region were uncovered during my stay in the archives, and thus that discordant feeling concerning who was actually fighting the war cannot, at this point, be substantiated for the Red River region.

⁷⁴ Letter to “Dear Brother,” January 1, 1863, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

that “these negroes had to be clothed” and to that end they grew cotton and raised sheep from which “the women spun the thread from the cotton and wool.”⁷⁵ Feeding slaves was the primary concern for Charles Mathews’ cousin, who beseeched Mathews to send molasses for consumption on his Shreveport-area plantation. He asked for the provisions to be good quality “as molasses will be my main dependence to feed my negroes.” He was nearly out of pork and had been informed that his merchant could no longer procure provisions. The arduous and onerous nature of procuring clothing and victuals was emblematic of regional hardships faced during the latter years of the war.⁷⁶

Impressment of goods by the Confederate authorities remained a source of consternation for the region’s planters. The Impressment Act passed in March 1863 forced farmers and merchants to sell goods at “reasonable” prices to the commissary and quartermaster officers.⁷⁷ William Chase penned a series of letters to the Quartermaster at Shreveport regarding the “forcible seizure” of sixty hogsheads of sugar, brought up from Mathews’ holdings in southern Louisiana, from the Coco Bend plantation of his late father-in-law, Charles Mathews. He argued that the sugar, with its high value, was being withheld from the “maintenance of the Mathews estate” and that the failure to be compensated in “the actual currency, the confederate states notes” extended the indebtedness of the family. Coco Bend was overwhelmingly a cotton plantation and the absence of any discussion within private correspondence regarding impressment of cotton indicates the significance of cotton to the Confederate cause or the decision on the part of Coco Bend’s owner or overseer to burn the fields with the Union approach.⁷⁸ Following the 1864 Red River campaign, an overwhelming number of requests to ease the shortage of provisions poured into Governor Allen’s Shreveport government from Red River inhabitants. As in many other parts of the Confederacy, governors received numerous imploring letters seeking food provisions and assistance.⁷⁹ The Executive Office of the Trans-Mississippi West appointed Henry Marshall to an authorized committee that visited planters “whose houses have been invaded and desolated by the recent incursions of the enemy.” Marshall was charged with “ascertaining . . . their more pressing wants” while also looking ahead to the next crop by “learning the wishes of planters as to the cultivation of their growing

⁷⁵ Joiner, ed., *Little To Eat and Thin Mud to Drink: Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs from the Red River Campaigns, 1863–1864* (Knoxville: UTNP, 2007), 154. For additional recollection of wartime shortages see Wells, *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River* and Anderson, *Brokenburn*. For discussion of the effect of wearing homespun on Louisiana women see Roberts, “The Confederate Belle,” and Anderson, *Brokenburn*.

⁷⁶ W.H. Buck to Charles Mathews, October 29, 1861, Charles L. Mathews Family Papers, Mss. 910, LLMVC. For discussion of food shortages throughout the Confederacy see McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (NY: CUP, 1995); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (NY: Knopf, 1981). Further discussion regarding lack of provisions in the lead-up to and aftermath of the Red River Campaign can be found in Johnson, *The Red River Campaign*; Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*; Joiner, *Through the Howling Wilderness and One Damn Blunder*.

⁷⁷ Ethel Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” *LH 2* (Autumn 1961): 416–418. See also Copy of Impressment Law, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

⁷⁸ William Chase to Quartermaster Jos. Cavey, January 20, 1865, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC. Chase noted they were paid “in a certified account to be taken up as soon as funds are received,” and not in legal currency.

⁷⁹ For discussions of CSA aid requests see Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*; McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*; Gregory Downs, *Declarations of Dependency: The Long Reconstruction of Popular Politics in the South, 1861–1908* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2011).

crops.” After deducing the planters’ needs and the extent of destruction of property and removal of laborers, Marshall and his committee constructed a plan for Governor Allen with “such measures as you deem practicable and judicious.”⁸⁰

Although most Red River planters avoided the invasion and desolation common to Henry Marshall’s committee, planters on the lower reaches of the Red did find themselves increasingly exposed to Union incursion. Among those impacted was Lewis Texada, who fled his Rapides Parish plantation, Castile, during the middle of the Civil War. A delegate to the secession convention and staunch Confederate, Texada likely relocated to Texas with the majority of his slave property.⁸¹ When the Red River Campaign arrived at Lewis Texada’s riverfront plantation in 1864, Governor Allen, a personal friend, urged Texada to let him be of assistance to alleviate the “treatment of yourself and family by the bastard enemy.” In his absence, the governor had already sold Texada’s carriage, horses, and mules in Shreveport and reported on the welfare of Texada’s slaves who were conscripted or working in the Shreveport environs. A few weeks after his initial letter, Allen wrote again to say provisions were on a steamer and forthcoming and inquired if Texada wanted his slaves sent.⁸² Months later, Texada—who returned to Rapides—joined with another slaveholder from the Coteau area of Rapides Parish and penned a long missive to Allen that chronicled the misfortunes of their area and requested relief. The men of the region had nobly answered the Confederate call, they told the Governor, leaving most households destitute. Bread and corn could no longer be purchased in the area, leaving them to request “you to furnish such relief as may be in your power.” Since the Union troops had seized Confederate cotton stores during the campaign, the formerly bountiful cotton warehouses on the Red were available to be filled with corn. Texada proposed shipment of corn of a few thousand bushels from Shreveport and then “sold out to the needy at cost.” The food would be “a very great assistance” and indeed “absolutely necessary” to residents of all classes.⁸³ Individual slaveholders also wrote to James Calvert Wise, who served as quartermaster general at Shreveport and had additionally raised the Red River Rebels Company, to seek aid from the state. One Alexandria-area slaveholder, Robert Hyman, wrote to Wise to reclaim eight of his slaves from Confederate service. Following the Union invasion, he had just “20 left out of 120 upwards have lost just about 100 negroes.” The Union army had burned his gristmill, “cotton house with said cotton,” overseers house, blacksmith shop, hospital, and most of the slave cabins. His property was “a wide waste” and he had sent most of the contents of his home to Alexandria for safekeeping only to lose these items to Union fire. Additionally, Hyman lost a tremendous volume of corn, twenty-three horses, one hundred and

⁸⁰ Executive Office, Shreveport to Henry Marshall, May 3, 1864, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 4042, 2740, LLMVC.

⁸¹ The historical record is unclear as to where Lewis Texada was during the war. It is possible that he served in the army, like his brother Joseph, but the sources available at LLMVC did not contain details concerning his personal whereabouts during the war. The letters cited below from Allen to Texada do not state where Allen, who is writing from Shreveport, is sending the letter.

⁸² Henry Allen to Lewis Texada, April 30, 1864; May 22, 1864, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC.

⁸³ J.H. Sullivan and Lewis Texada to Governor H.W. Allen, January 20, 1865, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC.

twelve cattle, twelve sheep, one hundred and thirty hogs, and fifteen miles of fencing. He wrote Wise for the return of his property to rebuild his burned buildings, install new fences, and begin to replant his burned corn and cotton.⁸⁴ A Rapides planter himself, Wise also ensured that substantial amounts of corn were “distributed among the destitute families of Red River,” in the wake of the Red River Campaign.⁸⁵ Although Red River citizens appealed to the Confederate state government for civilian aid, and some planters like Hyman encountered slave flight as bondspeople fled towards the approaching Union lines, the dislocations of war did not undermine regional commitment to the Confederacy and its core tenants. In fact, the relatively remote and hermetic nature of the region strengthened its non-defeatist mentality.

In April 1862, the Confederacy passed a conscription act in order to raise troops, particularly in light of dwindling volunteering throughout the Confederacy and the expiration of many one-year service contracts. The act—the first of its kind in American history—contained provisions that allowed conscripts to avoid service through the hire of substitutes and also exempted white men who held twenty or more slaves and worked on a plantation. The “twenty Negro” provision caused intense discord among Southerners since planters and planters' sons were able to escape service while small slaveholders and yeomen fought. In Louisiana, 90 percent of slaveholders owned fewer than twenty slaves. It was this exception, however, that led to class tensions within Confederate nationalism and manifested itself in editorials that chronicled the uneven enforcement of the act.⁸⁶ People in certain vital occupations such as teaching, pharmacy, ministry, salt making, and manufacturing army supplies were also exempted. D. Y. Milling thus urged his brother to produce salt and manufacture supplies for the Confederacy to ensure exemption.⁸⁷ Conscription affronted many Southerners because it “seemed insulting to force men into service” and this slight to personal honor could deter procurement of a substitute. D.Y. Milling's brother Jas was searching for a substitute for his brother, but wrote to inform him he had not had any luck. He continued that finding a substitute on “reasonable terms” was very hard and that he “doubted the propriety” of utilizing substitutes.⁸⁸ Many Louisianans viewed forced service as lowering the soldier's value to a degraded position. This, compounded with the exemption of planters, caused enlisted men to chafe at serving alongside conscripts.

⁸⁴ Robert Hyman to James Calvert Wise, May 21, 1864, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC.

⁸⁵ Executive Order, Henry Allen to James Calvert Wise, April 29, 1864, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. For additional information regarding the dependency of southerners on the CSA for relief see chapter 2 in Downs, *Declarations of Dependency*; McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Erik Mathisen, “Pledges of Allegiance: State Formation in Mississippi Between Slavery and Redemption.” PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2009.

⁸⁶ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (NY: HR, 1988), 15; Ethel Taylor, “Discontent in Confederate Louisiana,” *LH 2*, no. 4 (Autumn 1961): 414–415. Overseers could also be exempt under the act. For discussion of crafted Confederate nationalism see Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*. Towards the end of the war, the Confederate Congress considered arming slaves to fight on behalf of the Confederacy. The Black Conscription Bill was passed on March 13, 1865, much to the displeasure of most white soldiers. For additional discussion see Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*; Escott, “*What Shall We Do With The Negro?*”; Quigley, *Shifting Grounds*; Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: HUP, 2008); McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning*; Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*. For discussion of civilian aid in the Confederacy see Downs, *Declarations of Dependence*.

⁸⁷ D.Y. Milling to Jas Milling, January 10, 1863, D.Y. Milling Letters, Mss. 3758, LLMVC.

⁸⁸ Rubin, *A Shattered Nation*, 47; Jas Milling to D.Y. Milling, January 1, 1863, D.Y. Milling Letters, Mss. 3758, LLMVC.

Although the composition of slaveholding in the Red River region was overwhelmingly small to mid-sized, the historical record is silent as to regional feelings concerning conscription and the “twenty Negro” provision. However, in similar fashion to the slaveholders in isolated southwest Georgia, these slaveholders—generally mid to large sized—offered their slaves as conscripts to build defensive works and allowed slaves to be impressed at the Shreveport headquarters.⁸⁹ Most slaveholder letters simply document slave impressment though some deal with compensation for deceased property. Whereas civilian aid pleas were laced with emotion and implored the Confederate state for protection, the documents regarding slave property were—in keeping with antebellum precedent—cold, detached, and factual. When the Confederate government authorized impressment, it agreed to compensate owners thirty dollars a month or the value of the slave in the event of their death. This monetary compensation and guarantee induced slaveholders to grant the Confederacy the impressed labor of their slaves. Slaves engaged in railroad construction and maintenance, erection of fortification and manufacture of munitions, as cooks, teamsters, hospital attendants, musicians, and body servants.⁹⁰ William Benson of DeSoto Parish received a receipt for the impressment of his “negro boy Ellick aged 23 years black color 5ft 7inches high” for a period of sixty days under “call of H. Allen for work on fortifications.” William George Hale's conscripted slaves labored on public defenses for General Kirby Smith in 1863.⁹¹ Likewise, N.A. Birge, a captain and assistant quartermaster who had sent his slaves to Texas, received a receipt for the hire of “one negro boy in Genl hospital at port monroe, LA as cook” for twenty days at a cost of \$13.45. Twelve of his slaves—who were all given number designations instead of names—were also transported from Tallulah in Madison Parish across the river to Vicksburg for impressment duties.⁹² Authorities likewise impressed four of William Hutchinson's slaves to work on the public defenses. Two of these slaves were prime aged hands—Wash, aged twenty-three and valued at \$3,000 and Jury, aged twenty-two and valued at \$1500—also died at “the hospital of the engineers department” at Shreveport. Their death receipts record that Hutchinson was “paid hire till date of death.” In addition to his impressed slave property, Hutchinson paid the CSA five hundred dollars in February 1864 “to have said Hutchinson detailed to oversee his own slaves for twelve months.”⁹³ When Brack Johnson died in battle, his wife received a letter from

⁸⁹ O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 80–811. In southwest Georgia, slaveholders were more forthcoming when it came to sending slaves to work at Andersonville, but were resistant to sending their slaves across the state and “resisted Confederate efforts to recruit from their quarters.”

⁹⁰ Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 37, 41.

⁹¹ William Benson receipt from William Freret, Captain acting Chief Engineer, January 21, 1865, Benson Family Papers, Mss. 2424, 2440, LLMVC; Receipt for conscription, 1862-1863, William G. Hale Papers, Mss 2426, LLMVC. Hale was also a planter in DeSoto Parish on Shawn Place Plantation.

⁹² Receipt for hire, October 29, 1862; Receipt for transportation, October 30, 1862, N.A. Birge Papers, Mss. 918, 1036, LLMVC. The men were listed as No 29, 37, 311, 356, 264, 445, 336, 350, 462, 458, 543, and 166.

⁹³ Receipt from Trans-Mississippi Department for slave named Wash, Sept 10, 1863; Receipt from Trans-Mississippi Department for slave named Jury, September 19, 1863; Death receipt for Jury, February 16, 1864; Death receipt for Wash, February 16, 1864; Pass for boy Henry, September 6, 1863; Receipt from Trans-Mississippi Department for slave named Charles, March 20, 1864; Receipt of payment for overseer detail by William J. Hutchinson, February 27, 1864; Receipt for W. J. Hutchinson claims collection, June 24, 1864, William Joseph Hutchinson Family and Plantation Records, Collection 075, LSUS.

Shreveport that asked for further instructions regarding how to send back her husband's body, his still living slave, and the money in his possession at the time of his death.⁹⁴ Impressed slave labor built Fort DeRussy, located on a bend in the Red River a few miles north of Marksville, Louisiana. Construction of the fort and its river defenses began in late 1862 when the state militia decided to protect the Red River from Union gunboats and transports moving down the Mississippi River from Vicksburg. Five north Louisiana parishes and one Texas county raised funds between \$4,500 and \$25,000 for the defensive work, and slaveholders from the Red River region sent countless bondspeople to build this vital defense for the Red. Sixty-nine slaves died building the fort. Two of Henry Marshall's slaves—Isaac Greg and Daniel Bogan—and Alfred Flournoy, Jr.'s slave Bill Flemming were among the dead.⁹⁵ For Red River slaveholders, protection of their fertile land and the institution of slavery remained of paramount concern, and they offered their slave property to aid the Confederate cause and protect the region, even when it incurred considerable financial loss.

Throughout the war, Red River slaveholders continued to conceptualize slaves as repositories of wealth, investments, and as moveable assets. Indeed, the passion for purchasing slaves did not readily abate. A friend wrote William Benson that a fellow planter decided to purchase “three or four negroes” during the first year of the war since he “had some money and invested it in that way.”⁹⁶ Zack Howell, who had served as a local slave trader across a large swath of land emanating from his Greenwood plantation, kept his slave trader eye on saleable human chattel while serving in the army. He wrote his wife Isabella from Knoxville, Tennessee about the cheap price of slaves in Kentucky. Unshaken by the war, and eager to profit from the instability swirling around bondage in Unionist Kentucky, he effused “I have heard of a likely negro woman 21 years old + 3 children appraised at \$600.” Though it would “take gold to get them” he continued that purchasers could easily procure “a likely negro fellow a cooper at \$500.”⁹⁷ However, most slaveholders did not wish to expand their chattel. Instead, countless numbers of slaveholders sought to refugee their slaves. Planters from southern Louisiana, like Sidney Harding's family, began this trajectory by emigrating to north Louisiana following the occupation of the sugar parishes. DeSoto Parish was a favorite refugee location for the planters from along Bayou Teche to relocate or, at the very least, move their slaves.⁹⁸ Many others continued onward to Texas or else heavily discussed refugeeing their slave property to Texas to protect their assets, particularly because these slaves represented their only remaining financial assets and tangible labor. Northwest Louisiana represented the safest bastion of slave labor in

⁹⁴ Headquarters at Shreveport to Mrs. Brack Johnson, April 17, 1863, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

⁹⁵ Steven M. Mayeaux, *Earthen Walls, Iron Men: Fort DeRussy, Louisiana, and the Defense of Red River* (Knoxville: UTNP, 2007), 3–11, 321–323. There are four slaves whose names are unknown in the listing of the sixty-nine dead slaves. Marshall's chattel Daniel Bogan was killed from wounds received while serving as a bugler with a Confederate artillery unit during an engagement with Union forces.

⁹⁶ H.G. Hargis to W.B. Benson, May 15, 1861, Benson Family Papers, Mss. 2424, 2440, LLMVC.

⁹⁷ Zack Howell to Isabella Whitworth Howell, November 1, 1862, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS. For additional discussion of slave purchasing during the Civil War see Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*.

⁹⁸ Malone, *Sweet Chariot*, 58.

the Confederacy. The relatively isolated geography coupled with the political security within the CSA made it a stronghold and a logical locale to take slaves.

Once U.S. forces occupied southern Louisiana, planters fled north and west to refugee their slaves and created a well-worn path to Texas. Since Texas evaded any significant invasion by Union forces and because its vast size and great expanses of unsettled land made it difficult to traverse, the majority of slaveholdings and their slaves remained untouched. This made Texas the ideal location for slaveholders to refugee their slaves, with Louisiana providing most of the refugeeing slaveholders, closely followed by Arkansas and Missouri.⁹⁹ Over 200,000 slaves lived in Texas prior to the Civil War and thousands more streamed in during the latter half of the war. Eastern Texas—specifically the Gulf Coast region and areas stemming off the Brazos, Trinity, and Sabine Rivers—proved the most popular settlement zones. Most slaveholders relocated to smaller towns in eastern and central Texas to evade the enemy. The Texan geography ensured that while slaves might be aware of the war and might have recognized the revolutionary impact of Union proximity as well as a Union victory, very few were able to escape while being transported across Louisiana to Texan soil or while Federal troops were in Galveston.¹⁰⁰ As the gateway to Mexico, Texas served as a conduit for cotton, provisions, and slaves, all of which regularly passed the Rio Grande, along with political refugees.¹⁰¹ British observer A. J. Fremantle noted in 1863 that “the road today was alive with negroes” who were quickly “being ‘run’ into Texas out of Banks’ way” by their owners.¹⁰² Joseph Welsh Texada, younger brother to Lewis, served as captain with the 8th Louisiana Cavalry and wrote his wife Margaret a series of letters discussing the relocation of their slaves in the wake of the Battle of Mansfield on April 8, 1864. Joseph instructed Margaret to get “your wagons in reddiness and if need be buy one” since he was unsure for how long their China Grove plantation in Rapides Parish would remain out of enemy lines. He acknowledged that the plantation had “but little left” but that they needed to be “prepared to remove all our negroes and valuables if the enemy should again occupy our parish.”¹⁰³ Written from the Confederate encampment near Franklin, Louisiana in the aftermath of the Red River campaign, Texada acknowledged the tenuous

⁹⁹ Randolph Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821–1865* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1989), 243. For additional information on Texas, slavery, and implications see Thomas DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861–1874* (Fayetteville: UAP, 2003); Barry Crouch, *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans During Reconstruction*, edited by Larry Madaras (Austin: UTP, 2007); James Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (Port Washington: KenniKat Press, 1981); James Smallwood, Barry Crouch, and Larry Peacock, *Murder and Mayhem: The War of Reconstruction in Texas* (College Station: TAMP, 2003). On the eastern seaboard, many slaveholders refugeeed their slaves in southwest Georgia. For examination see O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*.

¹⁰⁰ Michelle Means, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home: African American Freedmen Communities of Austin, Texas, 1865–1928* (Lubbock: Texas Tech, 2009), 6–7; Daniel Sutherland, “Looking for a Home: Louisiana Emigrants During the Civil War and Reconstruction,” *LH 21* (Autumn 1980): 344; Carl Moneyhon, *Texas after the Civil War: The Struggle of Reconstruction* (College Station: TAMP, 2004), 12. For slave accounts of life in Texas see T. Lindsay Baker and Julie Baker eds., *Till Freedom Cried Out: Memories of Texas Slave Life* (College Station: TAMP, 1997) and Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*.

¹⁰¹ Kelley, *Los Brazos de Dios*, 163. Lewis Texada and Henry Allen were among the many Louisianans who emigrated after surrender. For Confederate political refuge and resettlement in South America and the Caribbean see Guterl, *American Mediterranean*; Daniel Sutherland, “Looking for a Home: Louisiana Emigrants During the Civil War and Reconstruction,” *LH 21* (Autumn 1980): 341–359.

¹⁰² Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, 82.

¹⁰³ J.W. Texada to Margaret Texada, June 24, 1864, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5119, LLMVC.

position that he and fellow cotton planters now found themselves in. Like most slaveholders, Texada understood that his slaves constituted the mainstay of his wealth and moving those assets from the proximity of Union lines would increase the likelihood of maintaining his property. Charles Mathews wrote to his son-in-law in early 1862 to urge him to decide on a course of action to protect his slave investments. Mathews stated that Chase “had better . . . determine what you will do with your negroes if the enemy enters this section of the country.”¹⁰⁴ A few months later Joseph wrote Margaret that her “plan of getting our negroes out of the Enemy’s reach I think is the best under the circumstances” and he implored her to have his father or brother “make the bargain.”¹⁰⁵ Unfortunately, the historical record is silent as to whether these Texada slaves were moved to Texas. Nonetheless, in her Civil War reminiscences, Margaret Texada recalled her retrieval of a male slave “of mine forced from home by the Feds” during the occupancy of Alexandria in 1864. This sentiment and her course of action are indicative of the tenacious and unbroken commitment of regional slaveholders.¹⁰⁶

The Red River campaign of 1864 brought the battlefield into the lower portion of the Red River region and the war to the doorsteps of these committed slaveholders. Following General Nathaniel Banks’ incursions, Confederate forces proved victorious at Mansfield in April that year and in the wake of the Battle of Pleasant Hill, Union forces retreated as the Confederates consistently “nipped at the heels of the Federals.” The infiltration of the region by federal forces upended the last vestige of the slaveholder’s antebellum world.¹⁰⁷ During the campaign, food supplies had dwindled and large quantities of cotton in the fields and in bales had been burned while the United States Navy seized other cotton stores. Cotton planters saw all prospects for moneymaking dashed. Joseph Texada remarked, “should the war stop tomorrow with the loss of my cotton and negroes the debts becoming due i should be in a very critical situation.”¹⁰⁸ Texada was not alone in his anxieties and his unease for his losses reflected the widespread alarm among Louisiana slaveholders who faced slave flight and financial setbacks as the Union army drew closer. The number of slaves who fled to Union lines, particularly in southern Louisiana from the onset of Union occupation and in the lower Red River region during the campaign, altered slaveholder’s disposition and attitudes to slaves. When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, slaveholders’ sentiment regarding their slaves and blacks as a whole underwent a seismic change.

For many planters across the slave states, the Emancipation Proclamation uprooted and upended their world. It signaled that the issue of slavery had moved from a central issue of the war to the key issue to be decided on the battlefield. Although of limited practical effect in areas under Union occupation, the Emancipation Proclamation struck at slavery in places still under

¹⁰⁴ Charles Mathews to W.H. Chase, October 12, 1862, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁵ J.W. Texada to Margaret Texada, October 22, 1864, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5119, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Texada, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5119, LLMVC.

¹⁰⁷ Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*, 114.

¹⁰⁸ J.W. Texada to Margaret Texada, June 24, 1864, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5519, LLMVC.

Confederate control, like the Red River. Lincoln's promissory note defined the war's struggle in racialized terms, and his Gettysburg Address promised a new birth of freedom for the nation and for the four million enslaved. The lines of battle at home and on the battlefield were starkly delineated. Following the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, the terms of military engagement were different because a negotiated settlement was impossible unless Lincoln was willing to retract this promise of freedom for slaves living in areas under Confederate control.¹⁰⁹ The Emancipation Proclamation, moreover, ushered in a period in which the reaction to slaves as well as the white slaveholder relationship to their property changed in a noticeable manner. The alteration would carry forward into the postwar period and would color the contours of race relations during Reconstruction. The experience of the war and the tumultuous upheaval of emancipation "refined Southern notions of nationalism and citizenship" and cemented "the existing narrative of a suffering South, a community united by external attack" as the foundation of white southern nationalism.¹¹⁰ Indeed, as the proclamation changed the war from one to preserve the Union into a war to reform it, the proclamation forced Northerners to see slavery as a national problem embedded in the fabric of the country while Southerners affirmed divine blessings in the struggle to protect slaveholding and human progress.¹¹¹ The Emancipation Proclamation itself did not free all slaves at once; in fact Tennessee, south Louisiana, and southeast Virginia were exempted since they were Union occupied Confederate areas, whereas the slave states still in the Union—present day West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Delaware, and Maryland did not fall under the Proclamation's auspices. Pocket areas, such as the southern tip of Florida, the South Carolina-Georgia low country, and eastern North Carolina were zones of Union occupation and an estimated number of 50,000 slaves were freed immediately. It was, however, in the remainder of the Confederate states that the proclamation bore fruit and where the implications of it would signal a sea change in sentiment.¹¹²

This transformation of the war into a "conflict of societies" not only made any last vestige of compromise on behalf of slaveholders impossible but also resulted in noticeable alterations in the Confederate stronghold of the Red River.¹¹³ The words, the intended trajectory, and the intentions of the proclamation became "*things* and powerful things too." Blacks were addressed directly by the document and welcomed to enlist in the Union army. Moreover, it made negotiation moot and positioned the Union army as the agent of

¹⁰⁹ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 245.

¹¹⁰ Quigley, *Shifting Grounds*, 213.

¹¹¹ Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*, 81–91; Escott, "What Shall We Do With The Negro?", 15. As Escott notes, the country during the war was a "divided and racist society both of whose sections traveled a conflicted and complex route before they could confront emancipation and finally, reluctantly, consider the future status of African Americans (xv)." For more on the religious undertones of the Civil War for both sides, see Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over* and Foner *Reconstruction*. For in-depth look at Copperheads, the anti-war and anti-emancipation party in the North, see Weber, *Copperheads*.

¹¹² Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 240–242. Lincoln did "not exempt occupied areas where the number of white Unionists was small or nonexistent and political reconstruction had made little or no progress—parts of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, North Carolina, and the Sea Islands of South Carolina. Here, emancipation was immediate (243)." See also Foner, *Reconstruction*.

¹¹³ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 7.

emancipation and standard-bearer of the goals of the Union and of abolition.¹¹⁴ In Confederate Louisiana, the emancipation announcement had a different significance than in the Union occupied southern portion. Particularly in northern Louisiana, very few slaveholders told their slaves themselves about the Emancipation Proclamation. Those slaves nearer to Union lines or in large towns may have known about its issue, but available evidence shows that slaveholders throughout the Red River region withheld this information.¹¹⁵ Many of them, like Margaret Texada who reclaimed the slave taken by soldiers in occupied Alexandria, firmly believed in their property rights and used the geographic protection of the Red River to maintain control over the slave population. New Orleans, however, had been under Union control since April 24, 1862 and by the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, occupied Louisiana consisted of “New Orleans, the banks of the Mississippi as far north as Baton Rouge, and the lands along and between Bayou Lafourche and Bayou Teche.” Butler had established plantation labor laws within this occupied region, which Banks would continue with his January 1864 General Order #23, yet wherever Union forces and slaves coincided, the fabric of plantation slavery began to strain and fray.¹¹⁶ Under the president’s pro-Unionist plans, Louisiana became the first southern state to undergo Reconstruction in the summer of 1863, when Lincoln instructed Banks to organize a loyal government. In tandem with the Emancipation Proclamation, this further darkened Confederate Louisianans feelings towards Lincoln, the Union, and slaves.¹¹⁷

With the Union aim of the war now focused on the end of slavery, Red River Confederates recommitted to the protection of the institution of slavery, but were also hostile to an enemy bent on the destruction of southern slavery. John Sibley, a slaveholder at Mt. Elon Plantation on the outskirts of Alexandria, wrote from Vicksburg “this ungodly war that is drenching our Country in the best blood of the land” was prolonging the return to the “peaceful pursuits” of antebellum life. The “long continuance of this savage war” sickened Sibley and assaults on the cornerstone of the Confederacy amplified the bloodletting on the battlefield.¹¹⁸ Brack Johnson's friend-in-arms was similarly frustrated with fighting a changed pro-emancipation enemy and remarked, “I don't care how soon they stop this foolishness.”¹¹⁹ Commitment to the cause remained strong—both in words and in protecting the region from invasion. One slaveholder declared, “to conquer the Confederacy, or subdue the spirit of the

¹¹⁴ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 243. Quote from Boston entrepreneur and Republican activist John Murray Forbes; emphasis in original.

¹¹⁵ Throughout the antebellum period and into the Civil War period, slaves found out information through the grapevine. While this was likely a way that Red River slaves garnered information, no archival proof has appeared thus far for its usage in this region during the antebellum or Civil War period. For discussion of the grapevine see Kaye, *Joining Places*; Steven Hahn, *Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, HUP: 2009); O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*.

¹¹⁶ Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 4–5, 38–39, 40. Major General Benjamin Butler was the first military governor of New Orleans. Unpopular, he was replaced in December of 1862 by Major General Nathaniel Banks. For investigation of Butler in New Orleans see Chester Hearn, *When the Devil Came Down to Dixie: Ben Butler in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1997) and Hans Louis Trefousse, *Ben Butler: The South Called Him BEAST* (NY: Twayne, 1957). On slave responses to the proclamation in southwestern Louisiana see Follett, *Sugar Masters*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008); John Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862–1880* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 2001).

¹¹⁷ Escott, “What Shall We Do With the Negro?”, 99.

¹¹⁸ John Sibley to E.P. Ellis, March 10, 1863, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

¹¹⁹ James Arnold to Brack Johnson, February 22, 1863, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

southern people, is as impossible as to jump from New Orleans to the moon.”¹²⁰ The redoubled efforts of regional slaveholders—with help from the Red River itself—to stave off a campaign in 1863, along with the building of fortifications at Fort DeRussy and the refugeeing of slaves, bolstered this statement.

However, the most prevalent manifestation of regional anger was the increased animosity by slaveholders towards the Union and to Lincoln. From the late spring of 1863 onwards, slaveholder letters are laden with vehement hatred of the Union, of Union soldiers and their destructive methods, and of Lincoln himself. Gustave Lauve, a Shreveport slaveholder, received a letter from his brother during the Siege of Vicksburg that chronicled the destruction around Baton Rouge. Though the damage happened outside the Red River region, the events unfolding in his brother's parish was a harbinger of the fears held by Gustave and his fellow slaveholders. Oscar wrote that “the negroes have all left their owners in this parish. Some planters have not even one servant left.” The privileges heretofore accorded slaveholders were dislodged as “our wives and daughters have to take the pot and tubs” while any men in the parish enter the fields “with the plough and hoe.” On their father's holding “eighty five negroes” had left “but about twenty have returned.” Only Sarah, the cook, returned from the house slaves. Lauve's letter, as was true in other planter's correspondence, showcased the destructive Union presence. William Sharp remembered that “the fiendish, villainous soldiers” surged into “this beautiful valley” until it was “overflowed by them” and their “thieving hands and torches.” The soldiers “drove the unprotected women and children from their native and luxurious houses” and forced them to take shelter beyond the confines and comforts of their plantations.¹²¹ Oscar Lauve wrote that Iberville Parish was now “filled up” with slaves that the Union troops “have taken from elsewhere.”¹²² The Union effect appeared still worse near Alexandria, where John Ransdell wrote that the “advance of the Yankees alone turned the Negroes crazy. They became utterly demoralized at once and everything like subordination and restraint was at an end.” Ransdell, a planter at Elmwood Plantation, wrote to his neighbor, Governor Thomas Overton Moore, about the devastation at Moore's plantation, Emfield, as well as at Elmwood. Ransdell's first letter opened with a statement about the upheaval brought into the region by the enemy's approach. Though Moore might have heard of the Union arrival, “it is impossible for language to tell what we had to endure of mental inquietude as well as dread. I tell you nothing but the

¹²⁰ Letter to “Dear Sir,” February 18, 1863, Layssard Family Papers, Mss. 2875, LLMVC.

¹²¹ William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, August 16, 1870, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC. On the hard hand of war see Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*; Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War*. On planter shock concerning the proclamation and new slave behavior, see William Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1991); Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*.

¹²² Oscare Lauve to Gustave Lauve, June 26, 1863, Gustave Lauve Letter, Mss. 893, LLMVC. For a discussion of slaveholders—particularly mistresses—feelings about house slaves during the war, see Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 97–136. See Joiner, *Little to Eat and Thin Mud to Drink*, 153–157 for Elizabeth Jane Samford Fullilove's description of her labor on her holding and management of slaves during the war.

literal truth.”¹²³ The Union advance had upended the routine and expected subordination of Ransdell’s slaves and the actions of his slaves, like those who followed suit throughout the region, flew in the face of accepted slave behavior. Like many others of his class, Ransdell’s unease only increased when the prospect of their slaves bearing arms and fighting for the Union turning into reality.

For Red River slaveholders it was fortuitous that the river had closed off and protected the region from the turmoil experienced on holdings in more battle traversed sections of the South. This had created a sort of bastion that allowed inhabitants to retain steadfast allegiance to the Confederacy while also preserving the attachment to antebellum power structures and modes of operation.¹²⁴ The available historical record indicates that slave life remained the same as before the war, although slaves were found cultivating foodstuffs and medicinal crops alongside cotton and laboring for the CSA. To be sure, want and hunger crept into plantation life, but the gap between the battlefield and the cotton field soon narrowed and conditioned the outrage on the part of slaveholders at the events that unfolded in late 1863 and throughout the Red River campaign. William Chase, who resided at Coco Bend and Chaseland during the war, wrote his mother-in-law that more than half of his forty prime hands had run off by October 1864, leaving “twenty-four men left of these fourteen are over fifty years of age and are not efficient.”¹²⁵ At Chase’s plantations as well as at Elmwood, slaves who followed the wave of Federal troops took or redistributed other property. Chase lost most of his mules and Ransdell reported to Moore that “the furniture was taken out of your dwelling house and distributed among the negroes,” with some of the furniture “taken to the negroes’ cabins.” Though the slaves had been “made to put it back” a “train of negroes” had set up an encampment on Emfield’s lawns and Moore’s slaves had shown these black Union soldiers “where every thing was, and then they soon made way with it.”¹²⁶ Union troops disabused the master and mistress of their power and, to Ransdell’s disgust, Moore’s slaves partook in this flagrant violation of authority when “your wife’s and Mrs. H’s likenesses were torn out of the frames and taken.” With the bondspeople tearing at the paintings, Ransdell felt that these slaves deserved “to be half starved and to be worked nearly to death for the way they’ve acted,” and this visceral reaction rippled throughout the region.¹²⁷ Fear of slave unrest and the possibility of insurrection—common throughout the South and particularly heightened with the inclusion of black soldiers within the ranks of enlisted Union soldiers—enraged slaveholders and buttressed

¹²³ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 24, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC. In addition to Emfield, Moore owned Lodi and Mooreland plantations.

¹²⁴ Similar behavior patterns occurred in southwest Georgia. See O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 59–110.

¹²⁵ William Chase to Harriet Mathews, October 5, 1864, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

¹²⁶ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 24, 1863; May 26, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC.

¹²⁷ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 24, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC. For an account of similar behavior and claiming of items from the big house as Union troops approached by slaves in Georgia see Young, “Ideology and Death on a Savannah River Rice Plantation.” For discussion about plantation owner’s sentiments about Union proximity and slave emancipation see also Bruce Levine, *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution that Transformed the South* (NY: Random, 2013); Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, with particular focus on chapters 2–3.

their beliefs about slaves and about the Union. Nancy Willard wrote of a “verry bold” slave who joined a group of slaves keen to raise a company and fight for the Union who had also “abused his master to the last.” He had boldly told his owner that “the North was fight for the Negroes now” and that made the slave “as free as his master.” This slave’s assertion of an independent point of view and a personal choice to fight for his freedom shook at the core of slaveholding beliefs. This slave, and the others who joined the Union and exercised agency, highlighted the transformation in black identity ushered in by news of the Emancipation Proclamation and proximity of federal troops. Caught by the Bossier slave patrols, the slave had been tied up while his compatriots were hunted down. Willard coldly reported that the slave “hung him self” before the patrolers returned.¹²⁸ Familiar with the brutal nature of Red River slavery, perhaps this slave knew that his bold statements and his actions would be met with a violent end and so chose to end his life in a final act of independence. Willard chronicled the bald-faced cruelty of slaveholders in another letter that detailed the punishment for a slave who attacked an overseer. The slave had cut the overseer seven times and so received “one hundred lashes for every cut an fifty for the balance of his misconduct.” This punishment also served as an example to the “great many Negroes in the woods” who had become fugitives and believed “old Lincoln is a fighting for them.” The positioning of slavery at the forefront of Union goals altered the tenor of the war and was a deeply felt affront to Confederates. Lincoln and Federal troops might be fighting to end slavery but Willard observed “they will see to their sorrow how their freedom will stand if the yankees gains the day.”¹²⁹

Coupled with this animosity was a heightened fear of Union invasion of the Red River region and panic about slaves running away and looting plantations as the Federal forces moved closer. Polly Mason, enslaved north of Alexandria, recalled that the closer the Yankees crept to her parish, the more slave men were taken by the men in blue “so that they could make use of them in the army.”¹³⁰ Ransdell and other slaveholders refused to believe that slaves left of their own volition precisely because the slaveholding narrative did not include a slave that wanted to escape. Thus, this flow of slaves from plantations to Union lines was not a voluntary decision by Red River slaves but an act of coercion by federal troops. Ransdell wrote that Union soldiers told slaves “everything was theirs and that they were free to do as they pleased.” Now that “the devil was let loose” Ransdell and his fellow slaveholders stayed at home despite not knowing “one half of what was going on.” Slaveholders barricaded themselves in their homes and those bondspeople with the opportunity to leave quickly headed off the plantations. Ransdell told Moore that “thirty five left home” from Emfield, in Rapides Parish, while “twelve mules and

¹²⁸ Nancy Willard to Micajah and Mary Wilkinson, May 28, 1861, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Mss. 707, LLMVC. For discussion of slave insurrection fear during the war see Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*; Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*; Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (NY: CUP, 1996); Hahn, *Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*.

¹²⁹ Nancy Willard to Micajah and Marky Wilkinson, May 15, 1862, Micajah Wilkinson Papers, Mss. 707, LLMVC.

¹³⁰ Polly Mason Oral History Interview, Mss. 4700.0041, LLMVC

four horses and four negroes” had run off Elmwood. By early June, Ransdell was certain that the departed slaves were “in the lines of the enemy” and unable to return “even if they want to.” He and the overseers tallied twenty-seven missing slaves from Emfield, with twenty-two of those being hands, and eleven gone from Mooreland.¹³¹ William Sharp sold his Keachie plantation before the war and relocated to Natchitoches in 1862. In a postwar letter he recalled that when he moved, he “brought with me thirty slaves twenty eight fine horses and mules four fine new iron axle wagons a carriage and buggy.” When the war was over, all of his slaves had left and “five head horses three wagons . . . fine lot of hogs” were all that remained of his livestock and vehicles.¹³² As with Emfield, the impact of slave flight remained greater in the southern part of the Red River region. To the north and toward Shreveport and its environs slavery remained essentially untouched.

The reality of Chase's property departing was a keenly felt slight augmented by the fact that it would be impossible to make a crop without slaves. Similar thoughts permeated Ransdell's bitter letters. Moore's crops were not hurt by the invading Federals but great damage had been sustained “from want of work.” Ransdell embarked on a trip to hunt and bring back the runaway slaves but found none and he returned with “no hopes to get any of our negroes.”¹³³ Exacting labor was Ransdell's top priority and he authorized the overseers on his property as well as Moore's to “chastise” the slaves returned to the plantation when they “showed fight.” When the enslaved man Nathan did just that, the overseer “knocked him down—whipped him pretty severely and put him in the stocks.” Ransdell was pleased to report that Nathan had “pretty well cooled down” and was now at his work. The ideological turmoil and upheaval ushered in by the Emancipation Proclamation and the close proximity of the Federal forces further hardened white hatred and distrust of blacks. Ransdell declared that the “recent trying scenes” convinced him that “no dependence is to be placed on the negro—and that they are the greatest hypocrites and liars that god ever made.”¹³⁴ The dependence on the power structure of slavery and the visceral reaction to alterations in the black presence “created an intense ideological and social clash” that resisted compromise with the North and incited Red River slaveholders to starkly declare their dislike and disgust with blacks.¹³⁵ For regional slaveholders, their antebellum inclinations towards blacks hardened and became brutally resolute in nature. Ransdell summed up the feeling when he stated that his slaves, and those on Moore's holding,

¹³¹ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 24, 1863; May 31, 1863; June 6, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC. A June 12 letter noted that Henry, the blacksmith at Emfield, and Clem from Moorefield had returned but when questioned about the whereabouts of Moore's other slaves “pretended as if they had not seen any of the rest of your negroes at all.” Emphasis in original.

¹³² William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, August 16, 1870, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC.

¹³³ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 26, 1863; May 31, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC. In his May 31 letter, Ransdell also relayed the camps set up around Simsport. He wrote “there were scattered about more negro “fixings” than you ever saw in your life.” Emphasis in original.

¹³⁴ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, May 26, 1863; June 3, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁵ Randall Jimerson, *The Private Civil War: Popular Thought During the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1988), 2–3.

would get what they deserved, since “my feelings, too, have entirely changed towards the negro.”¹³⁶

The hardening in sentiment towards blacks was also visible within the context of the battlefield. Confederate troops as a whole abhorred the notion and the reality of fighting black soldiers. Since the arming of blacks was recognition of their manhood and also ensured the freedom of the enlisted soldier and their family, the component of the Emancipation Proclamation that recruited black enlistment caused intense strife in the South. Many Northerners, including those in the army, shared the position of Charles Boothby, a Union army captain stationed in New Orleans. While at Lakeport in the aftermath of the proclamation, Boothby wrote his father that “negro soldiers are a perfect humbug . . . a white soldier never will salute a colored officer.”¹³⁷ Though many Union troops like Boothby remained unwelcoming to black soldiers, the Union army continued to accept African Americans as troops and, prior to the proclamation, instated policies to accommodate contrabands, the descriptor for blacks who entered Union lines. Robert Tyson, a Union soldier, noted in his diary that during the last weeks of the Red River campaign hundreds of contrabands were loaded onto boats at Alexandria.¹³⁸ By the summer of 1863, however, black troops began to trickle into the Union forces and had engaged in several major battles, notably at Fort Wagner in South Carolina and at Miliken’s Bend in Madison Parish, Louisiana. Confederate soldiers responded with targeted acts of unusual cruelty to black troops, massacring them at Fort Pillow, Tennessee in April 1864. Significantly, Tyson also reported the violence to black troops by the Confederates during the Red River campaign. His June 5, 1864 entry recounts the shooting of Major Pollock of the 5th Engineers, who the Confederates captured on the river and shot for “suppressing the fact of their being colored.” The fact that Pollock commanded a company of black soldiers was enough for Confederate troops to shoot him. Before being killed, Pollock also stated that all blacks “who wore the U.S. Uniform” and were captured “were shot in cold blood by the enemy,” while those black soldiers captured without a uniform “were sold back from us into slavery.”¹³⁹ Joseph Texada wrote his wife that he had “no fancy to fight contrabands when Yankees are in abundance.” He saw black Union soldiers as fraudulent and unequal to a white soldier and stressed that “the black flag has no charms” because for a Confederate soldier who was also a slaveholder, there was no “glory in thrashing out negro

¹³⁶ John Ransdell to Thomas Overton Moore, June 6, 1863, John H. Ransdell Papers, Mss. 959, LLMVC.

¹³⁷ Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 249–250; Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long*, 52–79. For discussion of white Northern soldiers’ feelings about black equality and enlistment see Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*. Charles Boothby to “Respected Father,” January 15, 1863, Charles W. Boothby Papers, Mss. 4847, LLMVC. For discussion of black soldier’s treatment in the Union army see Litwack, *Been in the Storm so Long* and Foner, *Reconstruction*.

¹³⁸ Robert Tyson Diary, April 26, 1864; April 30, 1864; April 31, 1864, Robert A. Tyson Diary, Mss. 1693, LLMVC. For discussion of contrabands see Louis Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Towards Southern Blacks, 1861–1865* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973); Robert Fabrikant, “Emancipation and the Proclamation: Of Contrabands, Congress, and Lincoln,” *Howard Law Journal* 49 (Winter 2006): 313–843; Kate Masur, “‘A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation’: The Word ‘Contraband’ and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States,” *JAH* 93 (March 2007): 1050–1084; V. Jacque Voegeli, “A Rejected Alternative: Union Policy and the Relocation of Southern ‘Contrabands’ at the Dawn of Emancipation,” *JSH* 69 (November 2003): 765–790.

¹³⁹ Robert Tyson Diary, June 5, 1864, Robert A. Tyson Diary, Mss. 1693, LLMVC.

troops but on the contrary a good deal of disgrace in being defeated by them.”¹⁴⁰ For Confederates from northwest Louisiana, fighting former property was abhorrent, inglorious, and vulgar.

For the majority of the Civil War, fighting stayed outside the boundaries of the Red River and the region within its borders remained broadly protected from the assaults, tumult, and destruction that befell the well-traversed southern battleground areas. This hermetic encapsulation allowed the contours of prewar life to continue; slavery endured and local whites remained hungry and cash strapped but broadly dedicated to the Confederacy. After a floundered attempt to infiltrate the area in 1863, the Union nevertheless undertook the Red River campaign in the spring of 1864 in an effort to break the isolation of the region and to rupture this Confederate stronghold. Political factors coupled with the desire to obtain cheap cotton and infiltrate this segregated area drove this Union led campaign which aimed to humble southern forces along the Red River and in the tri-state area of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. Possession of the region would allow them to readmit Texas, Confederate Louisiana, and Arkansas into the Union and give them important electoral votes in the November 1864 election. Lincoln also wanted to help the anti-slavery pro-Unionist German minority in Texas and this coincided nicely with Republican plans to gain control of the region and deliver votes.¹⁴¹ Shreveport’s strategic location and significance to the Confederacy made it hugely desirable. The Confederate capital and headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi West was the fourth target on the Union’s list of cities worth taking—after Richmond, Atlanta, and Mobile—since all Confederate units in the area reported to Shreveport. The city’s fledgling river line, the naval force, and the small-scale military industrial complex situated in north Louisiana added to the military appeal of the Red River capital. Apart from Grand Ecore in Natchitoches Parish, Shreveport also occupied the last high ground on the Red River until it emptied into the Mississippi river system.¹⁴² The bountiful cotton crops still cultivated in northwest Louisiana cotton fields and their related storehouses were all strategic goals for the Red River campaign. One Vermont soldier wrote that even those involved in the engagement questioned the integrity of the motives. He was unsure “whether the interest of the government and the advancement of our arms was the main object” or if the “pecuniary motives” of military leaders desiring to “conduct a vast scheme of cotton stealing” propelled events. He recalled that “some said the motive . . . was to occupy Texas and that the objective point was Galveston” and that troops were well prepared to seize the cotton along the Red. The expedition brought “extensive wagon

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Texada to Margaret Texada, September 5, 1864, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5119, LLMVC. The seminal book on honor in the South is Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*. See also Gorn, “Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch”; Kenneth Greenberg, “The Nose, the Lie, and the Duel in the Antebellum South,” *AHR* 95 (February 1990): 57–74; Elizabeth Clark, “The Sacred Rights of the Weak”: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America,” *JAH* 82 (September 1995): 463–493.

¹⁴¹ Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*, 46; Brooksher, *War Along the Bayous*, 7; Joiner, *One Damn Blunder*, 8. See also Johnson, *Red River Campaign*; Phillip Cuccia, “Gorillas” and White Glove Gents: Union Soldiers in the Red River Campaign,” *LH* 36 (Autumn 1995): 41–430.

¹⁴² Joiner, *One Damn Blunder*, 3, 15. Grand Ecore is about sixty straight-line miles downstream from Shreveport. It is 230 miles downstream from Shreveport to where the Red empties into the Mississippi.

trains, bagging, rope and other facilities for transportation” of the large amounts of cotton.¹⁴³ The swollen Red River, which had kept the Union forces away in 1863, now yielded a luscious crop. Tens of thousands of cotton bales had already been harvested by the spring of 1864 and these bales were sat on the banks of the river and in storehouses awaiting shipment. All of this white gold added to the region's allure and would also taint Union involvement. It is estimated that the Union confiscated over three thousand bales of cotton in and around Alexandria, though the exact numbers taken by the Union or burned by the Confederates in retaliation are unknown.¹⁴⁴

The Red River campaign was a land and river based, two-pronged engagement aimed at Shreveport that began with an air of Federal confidence on March 10, 1864, though General Banks did not arrive in Alexandria until March 25. Union army and naval forces made slow progress up the Red while they garnered small victories at the slave built Fort DeRussy, Henderson's Hill, and Alexandria, which was claimed by Admiral Porter on March 12. Banks arrived by steamboat eight days behind schedule and with cotton speculators and treasury agents on board. These speculators and agents had permits authorizing them to seize and transport cotton through enemy lines and were disappointed to find that Porter had already confiscated the cotton and branded it with “CAS-USN” to show ownership.¹⁴⁵ However, once they arrived at Grand Ecore, located eight miles north of Natchitoches, Union assurance of victory disappeared. In tandem with careless Union leadership and orders from high command was the central role played by the Red River. Indeed if rivers could choose sides, the Red River flowed in a decidedly Confederate direction and it continued to protect slaveholders on the upper Red from Federal forces.¹⁴⁶ Though Porter had managed to take his lightest gunboats over the falls at Alexandria, the levels of the Red subsequently dropped and remained low for the rest of the campaign. This low water essentially trapped Union tinclads, thwarted their progress towards Shreveport, and stranded Porter's fleet during the Union retreat.¹⁴⁷ For most soldiers, the campaign involved at least thirty days of hard marching.¹⁴⁸ The two largest land battles were the Battle of Mansfield, a Confederate victory on April 8, and the Battle of Pleasant Hill,

¹⁴³ Account of the Red River Expedition, Mss. 3422, LLMVC.

¹⁴⁴ Joiner, *One Damn Blunder*, 3–4, 62. The lure of cotton and the extent of Union confiscation is a major aspect of investigations into the campaign. For in-depth discussion see titles cited in footnote 69.

¹⁴⁵ Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*, 59; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*. Confederate forces retreated from Alexandria and the citizens surrendered to Porter. Possession of Alexandria would not remain sweet for Porter, as his tinclad Eastport was left there while he carried on upriver and he would encounter major interference as he retreated downriver to Alexandria in the wake of losses at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill. The Eastport was also hit by a torpedo that had been one of six pre-positioned by the Confederates below Grand Ecore ferry. Additional vessels had to be sent up to the Eastport to get men and supplies off it before it was blown up on April 25th by Union naval forces. See Smith, *Tinclads in the Civil War* for in-depth look at the naval role in the campaign. For details on occupation of Alexandria and destruction to Confederate property see Susan Dollar, “The Red River Campaign, Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana: A Case of Equal Opportunity Destruction,” *LH* 43 (Autumn 2002): 411–432.

¹⁴⁶ Smith, in *Tinclads in the Civil War*, quotes Irvin Anthony, *Paddle Wheels and Pistols* (NY: Children's Book Club, 1930), a children's book about the Civil War. Anthony wrote that the Mississippi remained neutral in the Civil War. Smith continues on page 9: “While its steamboats became gunboats and engaged in deadly struggle, ‘the great river paid no heed.’ In its various hazards, it was not partisan, a ‘respector of causes.’ Often the streams ‘seemed to mock the efforts of the warriors’ by snag, current, or low-water. ‘The malice of the river was like that, it was ever so impartial.’”

¹⁴⁷ Smith, *Tinclads in the Civil War*, 192, 203–209. Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*, 4, 83.

¹⁴⁸ Account of the Red River Expedition, Mss. 3422, LLMVC

officially a Union victory on April 9. At Mansfield, Confederate General Taylor sustained approximately one thousand casualties while Banks lost 2800 men. Joseph Texada wrote that the Confederates “whipped the enemy in two pitched battles and routed them,” forcing the Yankees to retreat. Taylor’s men took “a great many prisoners who have been sent to Texas . . . for safekeeping.” Of the casualties, and on land near Mansfield, Texada told his wife they included “many of our friends and acquaintances.”¹⁴⁹ The following day, both sides found themselves once again in battle at four in the afternoon. General Taylor’s right flank became disoriented during the battle and wheeled to the left too soon, which prompted two other units of his troops to charge headlong into a company of well-rested veteran Union soldiers. Pleasant Hill ended as a bloody draw—though the Union declared it a victory because they drove Confederate troops from the field. However, Banks’ decision to quickly withdraw downriver to Grand Ecore, rendered this battle a strategic Confederate victory from a tactical tie. In the aftermath of the retreat, opportunities existed for a resounding and unquestioned Confederate victory, but as with many Civil War engagements, opportunities slipped away, reinforcements did not follow up, and exhaustion, hunger, and thirst interceded.¹⁵⁰

Thus, Banks’ decision to abandon the capture of Shreveport began the month long Union retreat, punctuated for the duration by Confederate skirmishes and goading. During Porter’s subsequent retreat the level of the Red at Alexandria fell just three feet at the falls. This plunge in water depth trapped the fleet.¹⁵¹ The Confederates kept on federal heels until the campaign finished on May 19. Charles Boothby wrote his brother that “rebel batteries planted on the banks of the Red River” severed communication between Banks and New Orleans, while John Carson, a cavalryman in the Texas Partisan Rangers, wrote that his regiment “moved over on Red River to annoy the enemy transport” during the retreat. They arrived seven miles below Cheneyville and fired into a Union transport on the river until it surrendered on May 2.¹⁵² The Confederates continued to maximize the effect of the shallow Red to pin down Union troops and inflict casualties. One poignant occasion occurred as Porter’s fleet struggled downriver on April 26. Confederates opened fire on the Cricket and hit the tinclad thirty-eight times, resulting in the loss of half its crew. One twelve pound shell punctured the boiler of Champion no. 3, a civilian charter packed with approximately 175 contraband refugees from Red River plantations further upriver. These ex-slaves had been taken onboard just prior to the boats leaving Grand Ecore. The punctured boiler enveloped the Champion in a cloud of boiling steam, water, and

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Texada to Margaret Texada, April 23, 1864, Texada Family Papers, Mss. 5119, LLMVC.

¹⁵⁰ For additional discussion of the contention between Taylor and Smith see Anders, *Disaster in Damp Sand*; Kerby, *Kirby Smith’s Confederacy*; Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*; Johnson, *Red River Campaign*; Joiner, *Through the Howling Wilderness*; Ayres, *Dark and Bloody Ground*; Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*. The latter monograph also offers in depth look at the Battle of Mansfield. There were three opportunities for Smith to capture enemy forces: at Grand Ecore, between the Cane and Red Rivers, at Monette’s Ferry, and at Alexandria. See Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign*.

¹⁵¹ Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign*, 17. Forsyth maintains that had Taylor been given the forces he requested, he could have made a strong move to prevent the naval fleet’s escape in May.

¹⁵² Charles Boothby to George Boothby, May 21, 1864, Charles W. Boothby Papers, Mss. 4847, LLMVC; John Carson Civil War Diary, John H. Carson Papers, Mss. 1960, LLMVC.

smoke, and “over a hundred crew and contrabands were instantly scalded to death.” Another eighty-seven were so badly burned that they died shortly thereafter; only three people were believed to have survived.¹⁵³ The sight of African Americans scalded to death on a Red River steamer underscored the poverty of the Union campaign and the unwitting victims of it. Overall, the campaign was a Confederate success, due in large part to the Red River as well as hasty and uninformed decisions made by Banks in carrying out orders to get to Shreveport post haste. Henry Marston received a letter from headquarters at Shreveport that proudly stated, “thanks to our gallant little army headquarters trans mississippi department was not reached.” Instead a “boastful foe retraces his steps demoralized and defeat.” But payment for the Confederate victory came at a price. As Marston observed, Confederates held the upper Red River with the loss of “the best blood of the land.”¹⁵⁴ More importantly, the river, the region, and the Confederate forces had repulsed the Union from the Red River valley and successfully prevented the capture, dismemberment, and occupation of the Trans-Mississippi by federal forces. This strong defense allowed the Confederate government to maintain its integrity in this region until the last days of the war. This Confederate stronghold continued to protect the cause and represented a much-needed lift to Confederate spirits and morale. As southern victories dried up and were replaced by successive Union triumphs through the summer and fall of 1864, the role of Shreveport as a CSA stronghold represented and encapsulated a sustained morale boost for an increasingly beleaguered Confederacy.

Robert E. Lee surrendered the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865 at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, ending the long and bloody civil war. The news threw much of the South into despair and depression, and it certainly shattered the resolve of soldiers and citizens throughout Louisiana. While many of Kirby Smith's troops were demoralized by the news and considered the cause lost, Smith and numerous other individuals in northern Louisiana would not concede. At the end of April, a friend wrote Shreveport-based Mrs. Morris that “the terms of genl lees surrender, it appears, cover, the whole army of northern virginia and not those men only, under his immediate command on the day of surrender,” which felled in one swoop the “head heart and soul of the confederacy.” Though the “bravest Army the world has ever saw” would fight no more, Morris's friend underscored that “in nenety day the the confederacy will be without an army east of the Miss river.” That only the Confederate forces east of the Mississippi would be silenced by the Appomattox surrender provided a hint of hope that pulsed steadily in northern Louisiana.¹⁵⁵ Kirby Smith issued a proclamation to his troops on April 21 that urged them to continue the fight and on April 26,

¹⁵³ Smith, *Tinclads in the Civil War*, 203–208.

¹⁵⁴ Thos Allan to Henry Marston, April 26, 1864, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC. The campaign is considered a Confederate victory and various opinions exists as to the degree of victory, with some holding that it was a major victory in the Trans-Mississippi region. Forsyth, *The Red River Campaign of 1864*, 21–22, puts forth four reasons why the Confederate victory was a hollow one and most historians agree that the campaign had the capacity to change the course of the war but merely ended up postponing the war's end.

¹⁵⁵ W.F. Murray to Mrs. Thomas Morris, April 30, 1865, Morris-Sibley Family Papers, Mss. 562, LLMVC.

Smith and Governor Allen held a five hour long rally in Shreveport to rouse the spirits and patriotism of residents. Their speeches focused on the theme that the cause was not lost, that northern Louisiana was the last stronghold of the Confederacy, and that the fight must continue. Unfortunately, Lee's surrender signaled the futility of a continued war, even to committed individuals in the Red River region, and Smith and Allen's push for extended support failed to stir large quantities of supporters.¹⁵⁶

Undaunted, Smith and Allen continued to plan their resistance against Union attack, while Smith refused to surrender the Trans-Mississippi forces. Smith even pulled together plans to help Jefferson Davis—who had become a fugitive with the fall of Richmond—escape to the sanctuary of the Trans-Mississippi instead of Cuba.¹⁵⁷ For all his fight, Kirby Smith nevertheless had to face the reality of Union victory on May 8, when Union Colonel John Sprague arrived in Shreveport under a flag of truce, carrying an ultimatum to surrender from General Pope, the commander of the Union army's Department of the Missouri. Pope demanded surrender in the same unconditional terms as accepted by Lee at Appomattox. Smith took a day to reply that this demand was unacceptable and that he would not surrender the Trans-Mississippi army under the terms offered. Smith failed to comprehend that most soldiers and citizens now found themselves in a tumultuous, upended world completely different from what they had comfortably inhabited four years previously and they no longer had the determination to fight the victorious Union army. With the Richmond Confederate government in flight, Smith and the four governors of the Trans-Mississippi department met on May 13 in Marshall, Texas to agree upon a counter offer to Pope's terms of surrender. Allen and Smith returned to Shreveport with the new terms and gave them to Colonel Sprague. They remained optimistic that the Union would negotiate and Smith promised the Confederate governor of Texas the support of his troops should Grant, who had clearly declared he would only accept unconditional surrender, choose to invade the region.¹⁵⁸ By May 18, Smith had moved the headquarters from Shreveport to Houston, citing the need to concentrate his forces in case of attack, though by the time of his arrival in Houston, most of his army had dispersed. General Buckner, who had been left in charge of Shreveport by Smith, left for New Orleans on May 20, where he surrendered to General E. R. S. Canby under the terms of Pope's ultimatum. Smith arrived in Houston on May 21 where he learned that his remaining forces in north Louisiana had surrendered. However, General Smith did not surrender until June 2, when he reluctantly

¹⁵⁶ John Damico, "Confederate Soldiers Take Matters into Their Own Hands: The End of the Civil War in North Louisiana," *LH* 39 (Spring 1998): 194–197. For many soldiers, the lack of pay and the perilous situation that their families were now in was a greater concern and motivator. Jayhawking was a large issue in northern Louisiana in the aftermath of surrender and caused many soldiers to desert. See also Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana*; Rupert Peyton, "The Civil War Began and Ended in North Louisiana," *NLHAJ* 7 (Winter 1976): 75–77.

¹⁵⁷ Damico, "Confederate Soldiers Take Matters into Their Own Hands," 196. This plan fell through when Davis was captured on May 10 by Union cavalry in Georgia.

¹⁵⁸ Damico, "Confederate Soldiers Take Matters into Their Own Hands," 200.

ratified the surrender at Galveston.¹⁵⁹ Both Smith and Allen fled to Mexico, where the latter lived out the remainder of his life.

Nearly two months after the rest of the South had surrendered, Confederate leaders in Shreveport remained committed to the Confederacy. The region's Confederate loyalty would not cease with Smith's reluctant surrender. Red River slaveholders had stood at the vanguard of the secession movement and volunteered in the months before and after Manassas. Though the war did not leave the region untouched, planters continued to cultivate cotton and play a central role in the South's cotton diplomacy. The region housed the headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi West, created a necessary trade route to supply the army with beef, and built industrial infrastructure to manufacture clothes, shoes, harvest salt, and make medicines for the Confederacy. However, cotton and the Red River itself could not isolate the region indefinitely. Union forces arrived in southern Louisiana in the spring of 1862 and the Confederate conscription laws brought the war closer to home. The twenty negro law had limited impact in northwest Louisiana but widespread Confederate service did. Those slaveholding women and men who remained behind faced the uncertain and disruptive impact of the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's call to arms for African Americans. In areas adjacent to Union occupied territory, slaves absconded, proved unruly, and broke slaveholders' notions of enslaved behavior, all of which triggered revulsion and disgust at emancipation. The Red River Campaign of 1864 failed to make substantial inroads, but the impact of the war reverberated loudly irrespective of Shreveport's singular position within the Confederacy's political and military plans. The world of the Red River slaveholders was now completely turned upside down and this upheaval would be felt most acutely and deeply now that the cannon had ceased. Defeated but not humbled, white men and women in the Red River region emerged from the Civil War unreconstructed and committed to the restoration of white supremacy. Their reactions—violent, pragmatic, brutal, racialized, power-based—would all be in response to the completely foreign ground of Reconstruction.

¹⁵⁹ Peyton, "The Civil War Began and Ended in North Louisiana," 76; Damico, "Confederate Soldiers Take Matters into Their Own Hands," 201–204.

Chapter Four

“The Negro Question As Settled in Louisiana Forever”: The Trajectory of Violence During Reconstruction

Shreveport politician John Moncure wrote a bitter letter home in 1870. Like others of his class, Moncure served in Louisiana’s state government in New Orleans, though the changed political landscape had drastically altered the composition of representatives charged with state governance. The landed and formerly slaveholding representatives of the antebellum era now found themselves seated alongside black delegates, some of whom were former slaves. Such equality between former slave and slaveholder defied logic for the majority of white Louisianans, and Southerners more broadly. Not only were slaves emancipated, but following the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, black men had ostensibly been elevated on par with their former owners and given privileges and voting rights heretofore ascribed only to white men. Moncure recoiled at the physical proximity of freedpeople in the state House of Representatives. As he observed, contact “hourly almost with aspiring, ambitious and disgusting negroes of every shad of color,” was anything but enviable, particularly given his view that black politicians were “crammed to overflowing with manifest consciousness of their importance.” In Reconstruction Louisiana, Moncure and his fellow whites found themselves sharing political, social, and economic space with what he denigratingly called “these animals in human shape.”¹ Their vitriol, particularly in northwest Louisiana, towards the upended post-Civil War world reflected former slaveholders profound disquiet at the tumultuous changes to labor relations and the seemingly irreversible transformation in racial relations. Like most planters in the rural South, former slave masters along the Red River responded acrimoniously to black political rule and they continued to dwell on the economic, social, and racial determinants of the slave era. These legacies of slavery were not easily jettisoned and were embedded in the ideological, economic, political, cultural, and labor identities that informed and shaped the region’s options and prospects for black freedom during Reconstruction. The violent tenor of labor relations, politics, and the contested nature of freedom emphasized how regional whites “conflated blackness with slavery” and “retained trenchant assumptions of the immutability of race” in all interactions with freedpeople.² Red River whites, whose commitment and unerring loyalty to the underlying tenants of the Confederacy remained undefeated, refocused their dedication to the race-based structure of slavery in the regional progression from economic supremacy to white supremacy. As Reconstruction progressed,

¹ John Moncure to “My Dear Wife,” January 6, 1870, J. Fair Hardin Collection, Mss. 1040, LLMVC.

² Richard Follett, “Legacies of Enslavement” in Richard Follett, Eric Foner and Walter Johnson, *Slavery’s Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: JHUP, 2011), 53–54.

notorious episodes of brazen vigilante violence thrust northwest Louisiana into the national spotlight and made it all but impossible for the region's black population to exercise their freedom. When white southerners declared Louisiana finally "redeemed" following the inauguration of President Rutherford Hayes in 1877 and the removal of the last federal troops from Louisiana, Henry Adams, a prominent Caddo Parish black Republican, evoked the Bible and starkly observed, "God says . . . that he has a place and land for all his people, and our race had better go to it."³ The violent trajectory that elicited Adams's response began in the immediate postwar period and steadily gathered momentum and frequency during the tumultuous late 1860s and accelerated throughout the 1870s. Whites along the Red River could not revoke emancipation but they were successful in making the pathways out of slavery extraordinarily narrow and proscriptive.⁴ Set against an ever-changing political landscape, the contest over the form and nature of free labor and black political involvement created an arena primed for explosive violence.

In the initial months following surrender, the former Confederate states and the victorious North fumbled half blind in an attempt to knit the country back together. It was not until the fall of 1865 that southern political direction took shape against the backdrop of Andrew Johnson's Presidential Reconstruction with his focus on a policy of readmission.⁵ Louisiana remained a bifurcated state, with the southern portion under Union military control while the previously Confederate northern section awaited readmission. Above all, the formerly Confederate stronghold was quickly faced with the prospect of accepting military defeat and securing Louisiana's place in the country's political future. As far as Union commanders were concerned, the reunification of the country required the contrition and agreement of southern whites to a new set of rules dictated by the victors. By contrast, for former slaveholders, immediate concern focused on locking in the labor of newly freed blacks to cultivate the cotton crop. This meant that ex-Confederates quickly had to notionally accept being back in the Union, take an oath of loyalty, and agree to have the management of their laborers overseen by contracts approved by federal government agents. The defiant, hardcore slaveholders of the Red River responded to the free labor order and the reunification of the nation with a refusal to

³ Nell Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (NY: Norton, 1977, reprinted 1992), 84.

⁴ On the importance of not confusing emancipation with giving freedom meaning and of not mistaking the end of the war for the end of racial subjugation, see O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Michael Fitzgerald, *Urban Emancipation: Popular Politics in Reconstruction Mobile, 1860–1890* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 2002); Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transitions from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Chicago: UIP, 1997).

⁵ The literature on the politics of the Reconstruction period is vast. Key texts include: Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863–1877* (NY: Harper, 1988); Dan Carter, *When The War Was Over: The Failure of Self-Reconstruction in the South, 1865–1867* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1985); Glenda Gilmore et al., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: PUP, 2000); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago: UCP, 2013 (third edition)); Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet* and *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge: HUP, 2009); Kolchin, *American Slavery*; Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction. 15th Anniversary Edition* (NY: OUP, 2007); Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2000); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (NY: Knopf, 1979); Michael Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise—The South and Reconstruction: 1865–1868* (Cambridge: CUP, 1973); Joe Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed: 1863–1877* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1974); Ted Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction: War, Radicalism, and Race in Louisiana 1862–1877* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1984); Michael Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure: Postwar Reconstruction in the American South* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 2007); Thomas Brown, ed., *Reconstructions: New Perspective on the Postbellum United States* (NY: OUP, 2006).

acknowledge being part of the Union and by controlling the movement and labor of their former slaves.

Red River landowners—like other former slaveholders across the South—had to pledge an oath of loyalty to the Union prior to having all property apart from slaves restored. Refusal to take the oath—or to apply for individual pardons in the case of high-ranking Confederate officials and landowners of over \$20,000—meant loss of land, labor, and livelihood, and barred voting.⁶ This northern exercise of victory was an extraordinarily bitter pill for undefeated Confederates to swallow and along the Red River resistance emerged to pledging the oath and heeding northern commands. Emancipation, moreover, was an unfathomable concept to former slaveholders who had forged an identity built on the ownership and control of land and labor. When emancipation arrived at the end of a loaded gun in April 1865, these slaveholders were stripped of the power structure and identity that slaveholding had bestowed, and were also left uncompensated for the value of their liberated property. This lack of compensation stuck in their collective southern craw, coloring the meaning of emancipation and impacting the response of Red River planters to political and social Reconstruction.

Refusal to take the oath of loyalty to the United States was the clearest, most direct response to unification taken by ex-Confederates. Henry Allen, the former governor of the Confederate state of Louisiana, followed in the footsteps of many former slaveholders when he left the state after southern surrender and fled to Mexico. A letter to his close friend and Red River planter Lewis Texada illustrates Allen's continued commitment to Confederate ideals and opposition to the new order. Like General Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi West, and Thomas Moore, the former Louisiana governor, Allen retreated to Mexico in the wake of Appomattox, rather than carrying on the Confederate fight from Shreveport.⁷ Exile was preferable to return and submission to Yankee rule, though Allen remained fiercely connected with Louisiana. Writing in January 1866 from Mexico City, Allen responded to Texada's imploring and maneuvering encouragement to rejoin Louisiana politics. While grateful to "the good people of Rapides for their complementary vote" in the 1866 election, Allen confessed he could not accept political position even if elected because the time

⁶ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 182; 187–195. See also Eric McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago: UCP, 1960). According to Lewis Gray, the "investment in slaves for a typical cotton plantation of 60 hands would amount to at least 50% of the total investment required," and the holdings of slaves represented 45.8% of the total wealth of slaveholders in South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. See Ransom and Sutch, "The Impact of the Civil War and of Emancipation of Southern Agriculture," *EEH* 12 (1975): 11–12. For discussions of how ex-planters dealt with the economic loss of slaves see Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, especially chapter 4 and 5; Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther, "Cotton, Corn and Risk in the Nineteenth Century," *JEH* 35, no. 3 (September 1975): 526–551; Gilbert Fite, "Southern Agriculture since the Civil War: An Overview," *AH* 53, no. 1, *Southern Agriculture Since the Civil War: A Symposium* (January 1979): 3–21; Harold Woodman, "Post-Civil War Southern Agriculture and the Law," *AH* 53, no. 1, *Southern Agriculture Since the Civil War: A Symposium* (January 1979): 319–337; Claudia Goldin and Frank Lewis, "The Economic Cost of the American Civil War: Estimates and Implications," *JEH* 35, no. 2 (June 1975): 299–326.

⁷ On Confederates in exile see: Matthew Pratt Guterl, *American Mediterranean: Southern Slaveholders in the Age of Emancipation* (Cambridge: HUP, 2008); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868*, (CH: UNCP, 2005); John Winters, *The Civil War in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1963); Daniel Sutherland, "Looking for a Home: Louisiana Emigrants During the Civil War and Reconstruction," *LH* 21, no. 4 (Autumn 1980): 341–359; Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, 124–131.

was not right for his return. He did not “intend to become a Mexican citizen” but would wait patiently in exile until “the proper time comes” before a homecoming return to Louisiana.⁸

While Allen waited out political involvement in the immediate shadow of surrender, other former slaveholders remained tightlipped about their stance towards the oath. Still more delayed taking the oath for several years after Appomattox. S. C. Furman, the son-in-law of DeSoto Parish planter Henry Marshall, had served as a lieutenant in the Pelican Rifles, a CSA unit from DeSoto Parish, before funding and leading his own cavalry company—Furman’s Rangers. Having served alongside his brothers-in-law in fiercely committed Louisiana companies, Furman left no records or correspondence from the close of the war until June 18, 1867 when he finally signed the oath of allegiance.⁹ The dearth of recorded oath allegiances among private papers indicates that silent resistance and evasion, rather than accommodation, may have been a pervasive attitude toward this requirement throughout the region. For these individuals, allegiance was not an act done with pride or even contrition. It was viewed as something forced upon them and it was only because it was a necessary step, which allowed labor contracts to be drawn up, that Southerners reluctantly put signatures on oaths. It was, moreover, economic necessity, made acute by the lack of financial remuneration for the emancipation of their slave property, which pushed whites like William Thatcher of Caddo to swear allegiance in 1868, well after the close of Presidential Reconstruction.¹⁰ Conversely, financial pressure pushed many of the region’s landholders to take the oath faster than they might have liked. The ability to make legally binding labor contracts with one’s former slaves was withheld until the oath was administered, leading many whites to take the oath in order to finish out the 1865 crop. Prominent Red River landowner William Hutchinson makes no mention of his early oath taking, but he drew up 44 labor contracts on July 11, 1865, that were approved by the newly formed Freedmen’s Bureau.¹¹ Control of land and labor remained of paramount importance in the region and signing the oath, refusal to sign, and delaying the process were all methods utilized by these ex-Confederates to display their feelings towards reunification.

Red River landowners made their response to emancipation perfectly clear through their zealous locking in of labor, their relationships and perceptions of their former property, and through their ever-increasing control of black movement. Emancipation was the epitome of a slaveholding nightmare and regional whites reacted with a mixture of bitterness, disgust,

⁸ Henry Allen to Lewis Texada, January 10, 1866, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC. Allen died in Mexico in April 1866. Thomas Moore relocated to Crockett, Texas after the war.

⁹ Oath of Allegiance, June 18, 1867, Marshall-Furman Family Papers, Mss. 2740, 4042, LLMVC. Marshall’s plantation, Land’s End, was frequented by Confederate commanders during the Battle of Mansfield and was also used as a field hospital.

¹⁰ Oath of Allegiance, October 9, 1868, William Thatcher Papers, Mss. 893, LLMVC.

¹¹ Freedmen labor contracts, July 11, 1865, William Hutchinson Family & Plantation Records, Mss. 075, LSUS. The Freedmen’s Bureau was established as part of the Freedman’s Bureau Bill on March 3, 1865. On the Bureau see: Howard White, *The Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1970); Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedom*; John Englesman, “The Freedmen’s Bureau of Louisiana.” *LHQ* 32:1 (January 1949): 145–221; chapter 4 in Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*.

resentment, and anger to the newly emancipated.¹² At the same time, whites rushed to lock in black bodies to labor in their fields, often competing with fellow whites to ensure that enough hands were engaged for the upcoming year. The securing of labor would be a persistent issue throughout Reconstruction and the struggle to secure enough blacks to work at rates acceptable to former slaveholders added a continued layer of frustration to the labor issue. Former slaveholders euphemistically described their discontent with free work and located their struggle with free black labor as the core issue of their so-called labor problem. Landowners' attempts to work other groups of people at the pace they had utilized during slavery nonetheless proved unsuccessful and seemed to underscore, for white landowners, the undeniable suitability of blacks for hard labor. Red River planter Thomas Powell hired "2 irish men on woman just from the old country" and lamented to his cousin that he had "to work with them or be about them" for any work to be done. The "green as can be" aspect and need to "make them plow" had resulted in Powell also plowing his fields, something he had not done "all day before this year." Powell found these Irish workers so unsuited to the work that he planned to "get hands to work my land."¹³ For him, as for landowners generally, blacks appeared optimally suited to the physically demanding nature of plantation work and to the requirements placed by former slaveholders on laborers. In the minds' eye of the slaveholding class, blackness would continue to be conflated with gang labor and "the centrality of African Americans to it."¹⁴

Red River planters who responded slowly and recalcitrantly to loyalty oaths made their distaste at reunification known, but for others, opposition to emancipation was deeply personal. Indeed, nothing demonstrated a slaveholder's unwillingness to relinquish the bonds of servitude more expressly than their attempts to keep slaves ignorant of their freedom. Red River whites were certainly not the only former slaveholders who attempted to mute or conceal the end of slavery. Nonetheless, the geography of northern Louisiana helped planters stymie freedom's announcement. Indeed, there was often a delay in relaying news of emancipation because the region had been hermetically sealed off and landholding distribution was isolated in nature. As was true in many regions across the South, whites found it in their interests to withhold this legal change in status in order to maintain control over their former chattels and to ensure the cultivation of their crops.¹⁵ Once it was impossible or impractical to hide the changed status of blacks from African Americans themselves, Red River whites scrambled to ensure that they had

¹² For feelings regarding emancipation during the Civil War see Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over*.

¹³ Thomas Powell to Mary Bosley, May 6, 1873, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

¹⁴ Follett, *Slavery's Ghost*, 75. In attempts to find the cheapest yet hardest working laborers, former slaveholders ran through a battery of other groups deemed appropriate including Dutch, German, Irish, Italian, Scandinavian, and Chinese. For discussion see: Follett, *Slavery's Ghost*; Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: JHUP, 2006); Jeannie Whayne, ed., *Shadows over Sunnyside: An Arkansas Plantation in Transition, 1830–1945* (Fayetteville: UARP, 1993); Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*; O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; James Kearney, *Nassau Plantation: The Evolution of a Texas-German Slave Plantation* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2010), Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*. For discussion of the use of convicts on plantations see John Willis, *Forgotten Time: The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta After the Civil War* (Charlottesville: UVAP, 2000); 16–24.

¹⁵ For discussion of the delayed transition to freedom in nearby Texas see James Smallwood, *Time of Hope, Time of Despair: Black Texans During Reconstruction* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1981). See also O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*; Hahn, *A Nation Under our Feet*; Levine, *Fall of the House of Dixie*; Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction*.

a sufficient quantity of laborers on their holdings to maintain staple crop production. In many other parts of the South, attempts were made in the summer of 1865 to revive crop production nearly from scratch, however along the Red River, cotton and food crops had been planted and cultivated in 1864 with a clear need to harvest the following year. Slaveholders were even more wary towards emancipation since news of it arrived as they prepared for the 1865 cotton harvest. The decline—or potential for decline—in the amount of labor extracted from blacks made it crucial to contract enough freedpeople to guarantee cultivation of the entire plantation. Schooled in the logic of slavery where labor supply was guaranteed and potentially reinforced by hiring additional hands, former slaveholders soon recognized that free labor presented major challenges to the maintenance of the plantation system and that the availability of labor created “a bottleneck which was particularly constraining” to cotton growth. Planters accordingly either relied on the antebellum plantation agricultural practice of gang labor or they turned to tenants to meet market demand.¹⁶ Though the region would ultimately experience lower levels of production and a drop in land values—concomitant with emancipation—very few fundamental changes occurred to the agricultural system in the immediate postwar period. Here, low production, paucity of credit, and political factors were all reflected in the declining farm value; but the foundation of agricultural economy—cotton production by black laborers on mostly medium-sized plantations—changed slightly. Even as the plantation system endured in the short term, labor relations altered. Among the most significant changes were that now, begrudgingly, black hands were contracted and wage-earning, and large holdings began to decline due to laborer demands, crop woes, and financial pressures.¹⁷

Regional planters, like their counterparts in equally isolated southwest Georgia, realized that they would remain largely in control and that “they must have [black labor] or their plantations will be uncultivated and they will be ruined.”¹⁸ On the Red River, similar concerns simmered as planters and managers attempted to maintain production irrespective of the transformed labor system. The overseer at Coco Bend plantation wrote owner Mrs. Mathews about concerns regarding the plantation’s labor force in November 1865. Although no contracts had been made in the neighborhood for the ensuing year, he was “anxious . . . to hasten so desirable and exaction” so had made the trip to the Freedman’s Bureau, the federal agency established to aid former slaves, in Alexandria to have an agent come to the plantation to advise the freedpeople “on the necessity of making contracts.” He did not want to wait until the end of the year to lock in Coco Bend’s laborers and vowed to “push the matter in such a shape as to accomplish shortly the object.”¹⁹ Henry Marston had similar concerns about engaging enough laborers early in the year. In a January 1866 diary entry he noted that though he has “a

¹⁶ Ransom and Sutch, “The Impact of the Civil War and of Emancipation of Southern Agriculture,” 14.

¹⁷ William Highsmith, “Some Aspects of Reconstruction in the Heart of Louisiana.” *JSH* 13:4 (November 1947): 474–475.

¹⁸ O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 126.

¹⁹ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, November 24, 1865, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

considerable number of my negros employed” he was unsure if his “efforts to obtain them will prove fruitless.”²⁰ It was the intense competition for “enviable contracts,” as Coco Bend’s overseer dubbed them, which frightened these planters. They did not want to be in the position of fellow planter Hickman, whose “hands left him at Alexandria.” Above all, planters wanted to retain all the former slaves that were “capable and efficient” and had toiled on their plantations during slavery without losing any “valuable ones” to other landowners who were also in search of hands.²¹ In a letter to James Calvert Wise, founder of the CSA unit the Red River Rebels, former Louisiana Governor Moore, who had relocated to Texas, discussed the issue of contract competition. He noted that many freedmen were being “absorbed by contracts of different sorts” and sometimes released and rehired on different contracts with new terms. The varied price points of the contracts were of issue because “some of those at low prices will not be approved.” It was the desire by landowners to secure labor at the lowest possible price through competitive contracts that “case more trouble than otherwise would take place with the negroes.”²² Forced to vie for workers, former slaveholders were now in direct competition with each other to secure “a sufficiency of labor for their plantations” and they placed such importance on labor procurement and crop cultivation that “many are hiring who are not able to buy food for their white families,” as one planter opined.²³

Inter-planter competition was a new dynamic among white landowners and was both a “source of considerable irritation” as well as the cause of newfound tension between whites.²⁴ Planters had no prior experience in competing for the best and hardiest laborers; they had heretofore purchased hands to work the plantations and expanded those numbers to match the holding size or to absent themselves from laboring alongside their property in the fields. Now planters found themselves in competition, particularly during the January hiring season, and they discovered that more tempting offers from different landowners throughout the region could attract their former property. Worse still, from the planters’ perspective, contracted freedpeople sometimes left one estate for another in pursuit of better wages, working conditions, or accommodation. This phenomenon was recorded in depth by Coco Bend’s overseer who described how “nearly all the force” was “persuaded off by the young “Robertsons”” leaving their employer, Mrs. Mathews. The Robertsons had rented a plantation

²⁰ January 23, 1866 entry, 1866 Plantation Diary, Henry Marston Volumes, Marston (Henry and Family) Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

²¹ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, November 24, 1865, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

²² Thomas Moore to James Calvert Wise, December 31, 1865, Wise (James Calvert) Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC.

²³ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, November 24, 1865, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC (first quote). Thomas Moore to James Calvert Wise, December 31, 1865, Wise (James Calvert) Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC (second quote). A letter from Benjamin Cuny’s daughter in 1866 details how she had secured a cook who, with the help of the cook’s three children, also did the washing, ironing, and milking for six dollars a month. However, her letters do not state whether there are other freedpeople working her land. See “Your devoted daughter Maria” to “Dear Pa,” January 21, 1866, Benjamin Philip Cuny Family Papers, Mss. 4246, LLMVC.

²⁴ Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed, 1863–1877* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1974); 90–91. Alabama passed a law prohibiting the enticement of labor aimed at precisely this issue. The law was “intended to reduce conflict within the planter class” while also stopping Mississippi agents from poaching Alabama blacks. This did not prove successful and Alabama whites turned to the KKK to control plantation organization. See Jonathan Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South: Alabama, 1860–1885* (Baton Rouge: LSU, 1978): 60–61.

nearby and had rounded up their workers from the freedpeople collected on surrounding holdings. Phil Key, Coco Bend's overseer, was sure that "the negroes . . . as well as their employers" assumed that Key, as overseer, would be "broken up by their departure." However, as he assured Mrs. Mathews—while also reassuring himself—he had "gotten rid of such worthless trash." In fact, this mobility within the Coco Bend labor force had, Key proclaimed, allowed for the replenishment of the plantation's poached staff with "35 hands and they are all good hands." Thomas Powell was similarly sure that many of his white neighbors would "induce hands" from his plantation; this alarming new trend was compounded by labor shortages and fluctuations that arose from the labor market. Powell noted with disappointment "if we had labor enough this would not be the case." But for Powell and Key, as well as other regional landholders, good hands by definition meant freedpeople who had signed contracts "for the wages," who remained stationary and non-political, who did not test or feel around the boundaries of their newly bestowed emancipation, and who did not expect "favors & priveleges from "old massa" plantation."²⁵ By contrast, freedpeople who opted to leave former masters, as was the case for Henry Marston, William Sharp, Penelope Mathews, Thomas Moore, and countless others, were the epitome of "incarnate devils."²⁶ Tensions over labor relations and the need to reassert white mastery over the newly emancipated would be contributing factors for the wave of rampant regional Reconstruction violence.

The desire to procure labor also extended to controlling the mobility of field workers. Planters attempted to control the physical movement of freedpeople on and off the plantation as well as regulating the relocation of blacks from Texas, where many Red River slaveholders had refugeed their slaves during the Civil War. Coco Bend's prolific letter writing overseer wrote that not all of his hands had arrived from Texas in November 1865, and that "some valuable ones remained behind, especially my driver and cooper." Ever alert to the value of slave and now free labor, Phil Key watched the erstwhile freedpeople arrive back in Rapides Parish. Of those who had returned to the plantation, he was delighted that "all the slaves on Cocobend" had been making barrels and cultivating cotton, with enough "slaves on the plantation to make at least six or seven hundred" bales.²⁷ The overseer's frequent reference to freedpeople as slaves illustrates that six months after Confederate defeat, the "material and ideological inheritance" of plantation society remained resolute. For Key and many others, slavery "shaped and limited the parameters" of black freedom.²⁸ This need to control and master former slaves in the absence of legalized slavery bequeathed an enduring legacy to Reconstruction era Louisiana. Ultimately, the demolition of the power structure of slavery—an edifice upon which southern whites had

²⁵ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, December 31, 1865, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

Underlines in original. Thomas Powell to "Dear Cousin Mary," February 26, 1873, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

²⁶ William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, August 16, 1870, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC.

²⁷ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, November 24, 1865 (first quote); November 16, 1865 (second and third quotes), Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

²⁸ Follett, *Slavery's Ghost*, 50–52.

secured their identity, measured their self-worth, and had laid down their lives—did not destroy their reliance, commitment, and enforcement of racial hierarchy. With slavery now outlawed, white landowners rewrote and re-cloaked this power structure, reinforcing white supremacy through vigilante violence and by restrictive labor practices.

Containment and oversight of freedpeople's movements was an important aspect of the way Red River whites handled emancipation. In many respects, this was a continuation of the pass system and the domination of the regulatory culture that underpinned antebellum bondage. Central to this process was the creation and passage of the infamous Black Codes under the relatively permissive terms, for southern whites, of Presidential Reconstruction.²⁹ Indeed, former slaveholders believed that tight control of black movement, and thus economic success within a system of free black labor, "was dependent on the preservation of antebellum plantation law." By contrast, former slave Henry Adams, keenly aware of white displeasure with any amount of black freedom, tested the extent of his freedom in September 1865 by traveling to Shreveport without a pass. As he recalled in his Senate testimony, he did not travel without harassment. Six miles south of Keachie, four whites "asked me who I belonged to. I told him no one," which elicited a violent retort as "him and two others struck me . . . told me they were going to kill me." Unable to fathom black independence, these white vigilantes manhandled Adams as they might have done with a fugitive slave. When Adams continued his journey, "I seen twelve colored men and women, beat, shot and hung between there and Shreveport." His experience was replicated manifold but did not always end with freedpersons walking away alive. Caddo Parish was the most violent parish in Reconstruction Louisiana, and, despite its sparse population in relation to other more populous areas, it had 16 percent of all Louisiana homicides during Reconstruction. The Red River region was also the most concentrated zone of violence within the state with 45% of all homicides. Within that number, 85 percent of these homicide victims were black and whites were the perpetrators of at least 84 percent of those white on black homicides.³⁰ To Adams' knowledge, "over two thousand colored people killed trying to get away" in the aftermath of emancipation. These murders all occurred between Shreveport and Logansport, a fifty-mile distance from the top of Caddo Parish to the bottom of DeSoto.³¹ To tighten still further the narrow pathway out of slavery,

²⁹ For discussions of the Black Codes, see Foner, *Reconstruction*; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*; Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860–1880* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1983); Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South*; Amy Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); Carter, *When the War Was Over*.

³⁰ Gilles Vandal, "'Bloody Caddo': White Violence Against Blacks in a Louisiana Parish, 1865–1876," *JSHis* 25, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 374, 376. Vandal states that these statistics are compiled from data sets made up of cases for which clear information was available about the victim's name, the date, place, and type of violence. As such, though witnesses in many government reports stated that over 300 freedpeople were killed in Caddo in 1868, Vandal only retained 185 cases that adhered to his data requirement. Thus, the level of homicides in Caddo is higher than the 566 cases he utilized in this paper. For additional discussion about the high homicide rates in northwest Louisiana, see Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence: Homicides in Post-Civil War Louisiana, 1866–1884* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), chapter 1.

³¹ Henry Adams testimony from Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd session, taken from Dorothy Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen: Black People Tell the Story of Reconstruction* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976): 7–8. See also George Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (2nd Edition, Athens: UGAP, 2007), 27.

whites utilized labor contracts and careful wording “to reinstitute the rules and regulations” of their antebellum days while maintaining a patina of “complying with the legal forms of free labor.”³² White Southerners, echoing the practices of slavery, also formed county patrols and home guards to crush any large-scale movement by picketing the roads and disarming freedpeople.³³ As under slavery, parishes were hunting grounds controlled by whites who mobilized into posses and paramilitary groups to patrol the countryside. Seventy percent of the white on black violence in Caddo Parish during Reconstruction was committed by one or more persons in concert.³⁴ The Louisiana Black Codes, passed by James Madison Wells days before Christmas 1865, and in conjunction with vagrancy laws and apprentice laws, attempted to regiment and curb the boundaries of black freedom.³⁵ Although subsequently negated under the terms of the federal Civil Rights Act, the codes were former slaveholders’ “boldest and most systematic attempt . . . to rectify the ‘problem of labor.’”³⁶ Bossier Parish, for instance, allowed for the arrest and subsequent forced labor of all blacks not engaged in some occupation.³⁷ When rural freedpeople relocated to Shreveport in large numbers in 1866, the Freedmen’s Bureau aided in the enforcement of vagrancy laws and arrested the unemployed. They then forced them to sign contracts on plantations—as was also done for those who held out on signing yearly contracts—or required them to labor for the state.³⁸ For all their harsh regulatory requirements, the Black Codes were ultimately short lived and they failed to address the postwar problem of labor fluidity. Their repeal and the political transformation on national and state levels, culminating with Louisiana’s radical 1868 state constitution—a blueprint for radical rule—would all provide fodder for the visceral white reaction to Radical Reconstruction which began in earnest in March 1867 when Republican congressional leaders passed, against President Johnson’s veto, the Reconstruction Acts. The triumph and success of Congressional Reconstruction would set the political agenda for the next five years as Congress and black political agents throughout the South began a radical reconstitution of southern society where former slaves would join their erstwhile masters as equals in voting booths.

Above all, whites directed their ire at former slaves while the increase in the number of freedpeople in Southern cities continued to strengthen white conceptions that black migration and mobility meant idleness and vagrancy, a fear also shared by the Freedmen’s Bureau.³⁹ Until

³² Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society*, 41; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 93–94, 98–103. See also Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*, chapters 4 and 5.

³³ Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 27.

³⁴ Vandal, “Bloody Caddo,” 378.

³⁵ See William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861–1915* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1991), especially chapters 1–2; Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*, 122–133.

³⁶ John Rodriguez, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields*, 67.

³⁷ John Englesman. “The Freedmen’s Bureau of Louisiana.” *LHQ* 32, no. 1 (January 1949): 183.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

³⁹ For an in-depth study of urban migration to Memphis following the Civil War and correlated violent riots, with an emphasis on gendered violence and rape, see Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2009). Additionally, see James Hogue, *Uncivil War: Five New Orleans Street Battles and Rise and Fall of Radical Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006) for synergy between black movement, black emancipation, and white vigilante violence in New Orleans.

late 1868, the Bureau, fixated on making free wage labor successful, often played right into the majority white opinion, at times forsaking blacks completely and establishing strict policies and patrols.⁴⁰ One of the core elements of the Bureau's remit was to complete and approve contracts binding freedmen to plantation labor. This objective was particularly challenging to Bureau personnel in Caddo and Bossier, who contended with disputed labor contracts alongside racial violence, homicides, and the flooding of the Red River. Planters came to favor Bureau involvement in contracts because it stipulated that wages could be docked from workers who refused to work or left employment without proper authorization.⁴¹ However, regional whites were less pleased with the Shreveport Bureau chief's involvement in matters that curbed their personal control over their laborers. In accordance with landowners' desires to limit black movement, Red River steamboat captains refused freedpeople passage on their ships. When Martin Flood, the regional Bureau commander, investigated a January 1867 incident wherein a black family was denied passage, he learned that riverboat men along the Red commonly refused freedmen passage in order to prevent a possible regional labor shortage.⁴² Aided by local steamboat captains, planters' found themselves at odds with the Bureau when it favored the free movement of labor and certainly when Bureau officials advocated the root and branch change desired by northern Radical Republicans. With ex-slaveholders and Bureau agents increasingly at odds, particularly over the mobility of labor, the effectiveness of the Freedmen's Bureau declined as Presidential Reconstruction gave way to Radical Reconstruction in 1867.

Whites like Henry Marston and Phil Key, Coco Bend's overseer, took matters into their own hands to guarantee a constant supply of workers. To prepare themselves for the agricultural year, they would often ensure there was a certain amount of cash on hand when contract season commenced in order to cement wage and rental prices for the year. Cash on hand also made it possible to pay half of the total accrued wages every four months—a standard practice in the region—with the silver lining of needing less free cash than what “pay proper would amount to.” As detailed to Mrs. Mathews, Key noted that a thousand dollars was needed “to pay the hands one half of their wages for the four months,” and the act of paying the hands was “essential” to keeping cotton cultivation running smoothly.⁴³ Key's attention to cash flow was indispensable. In the immediate postwar period, waged gang work emerged as the first compromise in the free labor system. It predated the transition to sharecropping which would dominate the cotton South in the 1880s, and waged work permitted the maintenance of the familiar plantation modes of production. These free black laborers worked the cotton fields in

⁴⁰ See Englesman, “The Freedmen's Bureau of Louisiana,” 157–164, 174–191.

⁴¹ Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*; Solomon Smith, “The Freedmen's Bureau in Shreveport: The Struggle for Control of the Red River District,” *LH* 41, no 4 (Autumn 2000): 436, 438; White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, 107; Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South*, 52.

⁴² Smith, “The Freedmen's Bureau in Shreveport,” 440.

⁴³ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, January 6, 1866 (first quote); March 14, 1886; April 7, 1866 (second quote), Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

⁴³ Follett, *Slavery's Ghost*, 50–52. See also Carter, *When the War Was Over*, 99–102.

large gangs, much as they had under slavery, but beyond these similarities, change as well as continuity defined the cotton region. Former slaveholders in particular continued to prize the close command structure of gang work in this transition to freedom. They attempted to replicate antebellum gang structure, even using cash wages or a share of the crop to incentivize labor. Waged labor, however, was sharply distinct from slave labor systems because postbellum gang laborers worked clearly specified hours completing tasks detailed in a contract and under the supervision of the overseer. In contractual terms, this was a major break with slavery and very different to the relative autonomy of sharecropping and tenancy.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, former slaveholders attempted to wrest command over the new terms of labor. The wage scale was lowered in March 1865 from 1864 rates under the Bureau of Free Labor. Male hands were divided into three classes with pay that ranged from six to ten dollars per month; the three classes of female hands garnered between five and eight dollars per month. This sliding wage scale comported in many respects to antebellum precedent where slaves had been classified by age and fitness into first, second, and third class hands. Wages and the determination of an individual's labor was tainted with slavery's brush. The same pay bias existed for boys and girls under fourteen, with the former receiving three dollars and the latter two dollars monthly, roughly equated to full and half hand status in antebellum parlance. Skilled workers, including engineers, foremen, and mechanics, were entitled to receive at least five additional dollars per month above the first-class rate.⁴⁵

Since slavery supported white convictions of racial capacity and incapacity, the strong emphasis on contracted labor also allowed for whites to chronicle the job requirements and freedpeople's permissible actions.⁴⁶ Contract parameters, work hours, and privileges varied greatly throughout the region. At William Hutchinson's Caspiana holding, the 44 contracted freedpeople were allowed all of Saturday "at their sole disposal" in addition to the "privilege of cutting cord wood on that day." Hutchinson also agreed to provide the mule teams to haul the cordwood to the Red River where the proceeds of the sold wood would belong to the freedpeople.⁴⁷ On Hubbard Bosley's Bossier holding, he furnished the land, farming utensils, horses and mules along with their feed but expected his laborers to "furnish their own provision." His 1867 contract agreed to give the freedpeople "on[e] half of the crop cultivated" from the second portion as a form of payment. He required the freedpeople to take care of his horses, to toil from "daybrake til darke, and abide by the plantation bell," to only remain in their cabins during work hours if ill, to keep up maintenance on the plantation's fences and gates, and to not fight on his land.⁴⁸ Similar work hours were kept at Coco Bend where laborers "work from daylight to dark, and from Mon morn til Saturday at noon." At Coco Bend two suits of

⁴⁴ See Wiener, *Social Origins of the New South*, 35–37.

⁴⁵ White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, 107–108.

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 30.

⁴⁷ Freedmen labor contracts, July 11, 1865, William Hutchinson Family & Plantation Records, Mss 075, LSUS.

⁴⁸ Freedmen labor contracts, January 1867, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC.

clothes and two pairs of shoes were given yearly—echoing antebellum practices—but no portion of the crop bestowed. Instead they were allowed to “have the half of each Saturday & a garden or corn patch” if desired.⁴⁹ At all three holdings, one half of wages were paid every four months. The overseer at the Tauzin family’s Natchitoches plantation scrupulously noted how many days a month each hand worked from the day the contract started until he had it approved by the Bureau and withheld wages accordingly.⁵⁰ At Raceland, another Mathews family holding, the overseer paid “\$10 to \$15 for men and from \$6 to \$10 for women,” and while he provided food, he gave no clothes. Unlike at Coco Bend, he paid out “half at the end of every month and the balance at the end of the year,” in keeping with the Tauzin plantation practice.⁵¹ Although these new laboring strategies dovetailed with Bureau rules, the regulatory culture of slavery severely marked the new plantation order and ensured that former slaveholders leveraged personal power and authority over their onetime slaves. The withholding of wages tackled the problem of flight as overseers like Key concluded that former slaves were less likely to break their contracts and stay on site if they were owed wages that were only disbursed every four months or at the close of the agricultural year. Of course, these tactics had the ultimate benefit of assuring that plantation production advanced without major interference.

A secured contract did not imply that freedpeople were entirely protected from abuse and mistreatment. As was also true in southwest Georgia, freedpeople found that once contracts had secured laborers for landholders, hired workers were at their mercy and subject to the use, abuse, and punishment that had befallen them as slaves.⁵² Despite the inclusion of non-violence clauses in most contracts, whippings were commonplace throughout the region. Henry Adams told how his sister was beaten one day by her former mistress and “whipped . . . nearly to death” the following day by the ex-master. After this incident, a number of freedpeople on the holding decided to leave for Shreveport with their possessions. Forty armed white men accosted Adams and his cohort, shooting at them and taking Adams’s horse, along with “all of our clothing and bed-clothing and money.” While robbing and shooting at the freedpeople, Adams recalled the white declaration that “they were going to kill every n---ger they found leaving their masters.”⁵³ Unwilling to surrender the kind of violent personal power slavery granted masters, former slaveholders attempted to reinforce the whip; when that failed, as Adams’s testimony reveals, they turned to their pistols to reinforce white supremacy. For Adams and his pursuers, the enduring nature of white feelings and their hate-filled actions towards freedpeople reflected the undeniable tension in the region that intensified and became increasingly vitriolic in the coming months.

⁴⁹ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, January 6, 1866, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC. Key also requested money from Mathews to furnish the hands with winter clothes to “prevent them not working” because of inappropriate attire.

⁵⁰ Payroll of Laborers, January 8, 1865, Marcelin Tauzin and Family Papers, Mss. 912, LLMVC.

⁵¹ Jas Sibley to “Dear Madam,” March 10, 1866, Charles L. Mathews Family Papers, Mss. 910, LLMVC.

⁵² O’Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*, 227.

⁵³ Henry Adams testimony from Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd session, taken from Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen*, 8.

Control of black movement and locking in of labor were not the only issues weighing on landowners. A lack of cash and capital, coupled with the uncompensated loss of slaves with which to underwrite loans, intensified the postwar struggle for regional whites. Louisiana Johnson wrote that her family plantation had remained uncultivated since the surrender because it took “about all we can make to clear expenses.”⁵⁴ Henry Marston was likewise deeply angered when a specific tax on cotton was passed in 1866. Though it was repealed in 1868, the tax required planters to return the receipts for cotton as part of their income regardless of the year the cotton was raised. This heavy levy in tandem with crop issues that beset the region meant that Marston—who, like many former slaveholders, was a sparse record keeper following the war—felt enough immediate relief from the tax’s repeal to note it in his diary.⁵⁵ The loss of his property and stature additionally weighed heavily on Marston. In an unsent letter from 1875, he lamented his reduced “pecuniary circumstances” and those of “hundreds of thousands of others” as a result of the war and slave emancipation. He angrily recalled “the people of this parish alone owned property to the amounts of over 14 million!” while the annual value had plummeted to 1.5 million.⁵⁶ Indeed, by early 1867 planters had reached bankruptcy and land prices had fallen to just one-fifth of prewar prices. Land depreciation in Louisiana was 70 percent in a large part because of indebtedness, scarcity of money, and the great loss of capital in slaves compounded by a lack of a ready new form of financial capital. These problems were compounded by the lack of new forms of financial capital to replace slave-based mortgages.⁵⁷ It was the shortage of credit—a form of currency easily available when slaves could be bought, sold, and leveraged with alacrity—more so than even the lack of cash that would lead toward a sharecropping preference in the region and throughout the former cotton states.

Fiscal woes were further compounded by the unpredictable nature of the Red River. Just as the river had presented settlers with a unique set of challenges and had protected the region during the Civil War, the river played a pivotal role in their livelihoods during the postwar period. Indomitable and unmastered, the river overflowed and flooded in both 1866 and 1867, ruining both years’ crops. A plague of armyworm and boll weevil followed close behind the flooding and landholders’ letters reflect the cotton growers’ despair. William Sharp wrote that the “terrible overflow” of the Red destroyed everything including “the last vegetable in our

⁵⁴ Louisiana Johnson to “Dear Kate,” February 2, 1871, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Louisiana was the daughter of Hubbard Bosley’s brother and sister-in-law, William and Eliza Powell respectively, and was married to Brack Johnson, whose Civil War letters can be found in chapter 3.

⁵⁵ Henry Marston Diary, February 6, 1868, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC. One of the few items Marston held onto for 1866 was a copy of the special tax on cotton.

⁵⁶ Unsent letter, May 13, 1875, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

⁵⁷ Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 58. Ransom and Sutch, “Impact of Civil War and Emancipation,” 16. See also, Sven Beckert, “Emancipation and Empire: Reconstructing the Worldwide Web of Cotton Production in the Age of the American Civil War,” *AHR* 109, no 5 (December 2004): 1424. On the comparative economic state of the South after emancipation in relation to other countries following overthrow of slavery see Peter Kolchin, “The Tragic Era? Interpreting Southern Reconstruction in Comparative Perspective,” in Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture after Slavery* (Pittsburgh: UPP, 1992) and Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008). On the loss of control and the white anxiety that accompanied the tenancy share system see Follett, *Slavery’s Ghost*.

garden.” The overflow in 1867 took away all “but our land.”⁵⁸ Henry Marston similarly recorded that the Red was very high commencing on April 22, 1866 and continued to swell steadily through May 20th. His 1867 diary echoed the complete devastation of Sharp’s letter. In June 1867, he wrote that the flooding of the Red was “disasterous indeed” with all of the plantations “more or less underwater.”⁵⁹ The flood waters had been accompanied by hail storms, windstorms, and cold that “infected and retarded the growth of the cotton” along with all other crops. There was such a superfluity of water that on Coco Bend, as on neighboring holdings, the dropping off of the Red at the end of June 1866 provided “no drainage to this plantation excepting in failing to allow the ditches to convey the rainwater.”⁶⁰ Any expectation of a comfortable return from the 1865, 1866, or 1867 cotton plantings were dashed by the Red River.

Crop disease followed swiftly behind the rush of water. Autumn brought destruction of the crop by armyworm, with 1867 losses due to the Red estimated at five million dollars. Armyworm followed the flood in 1866 but appeared in 1867 during the picking season.⁶¹ James Calvert Wise wrote Thomas Moore in Texas of the grim situation in Rapides. Wise’s descriptions of the terrible situation and future outlook prompted Moore to bemoan their predicament. They were a “doomed people,” and Moore followed with the litany of devastation on his own plantation, 150 miles west of Shreveport.⁶² Flooding also meant an increased reliance on the Freedmen’s Bureau by both the black and white community, who faced hunger and want on inundated holdings. Bossier planters were badly affected and spent most of 1867 attempting to raise funds from cash strapped landowners to fix and build levees on the Caddo side of the Red. However, with most of the planters’ money put towards raising the crop, cash and credit strapped planters often had neither money nor credit left to pay freedmen or procure food for laborers. Bureau officials nonetheless stepped in to maintain operations. They requested rations and supplies for Caddo and Bossier so that landowners could pay, feed, and retain their laborers.⁶³ The crop failure of 1867, occurring just as a yellow fever epidemic began, rendered tens of thousands of freedpeople homeless and without food or clothing. The aforementioned absence of funds meant that the only solution to this grave humanitarian crisis seemed to be federal aid from the Bureau. Again, the Bureau stepped up to maintain the ailing

⁵⁸ William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, August 16, 1870, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC. For added discussion of postwar flooding, see William Highsmith, “Some Aspects of Reconstruction in the Heart of Louisiana,” *JSH* 13, no. 4 (November 1947): 460–491; Smith, “The Freedmen’s Bureau in Shreveport.”

⁵⁹ Henry Marston Diary, April 22, 1866; May 20, 1866; June 22, 1867 (first quote); June 27, 1867 (second quote), Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

⁶⁰ Phil Key to Penelope Mathews, June 29, 1866, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

⁶¹ Henry Marston Diary, September 3, 1867, Henry Marston Family Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC; Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society*, 63–65. See also Roark, *Masters Without Slaves*; Smith, “The Freedman’s Bureau in Shreveport”; White, *Freedman’s Bureau in Louisiana*.

⁶² Thomas Moore to James Calvert Wise, May 29, 1866, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. Wise owned Grand Bend Plantation on the Red in Rapides Parish.

⁶³ 1867 Parish Police Minutes, Bossier Parish, Reel 50—Bienville and Bossier, W.P.A. Collection. Historical Records Survey Transcriptions of Louisiana Police Jury Records, Mss. 2984, LLMVC; Smith, “The Struggle for Control of the Red River District”: 438, 446. On issues of planter solvency see Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society*, 76–88.

plantation system. This aid was authorized in January 1868 by the War Department and it issued supplies to planters and allowed them to take a first lien on all crops and equipment used to produce crops.⁶⁴

Financial and environmental difficulties added significant pressures to landowners and the freedpeople contracted to work plantations. When combined with the fervent white need to control the movements of and access to freedom for regional blacks, these financial, environmental, humanitarian, and labor issues became flash points that fueled the violent tendencies of former slaveholders throughout northwest Louisiana. To make matters worse, the relatively freewheeling aspect of Presidential Reconstruction was fast being replaced by more radical and—particularly from the perspective of regional whites—sinister political changes and social privileges. Although Congressional Reconstruction would eventually give way to white Democratic home rule across the South, a process that white southerners triumphantly named “Redemption,” the onset of direct Military Reconstruction in 1867 unleashed widespread transformations. African Americans enjoyed an unprecedented level of political clout, personal improvement, and male suffrage, and across the former slave states—Louisiana included—black voters and their representatives began the work of transforming southern life and politics from the ground up. Former planters and white landowners across northwest Louisiana did not welcome Radical Reconstruction and met these policies with aggression, resistance, and extreme violence towards freedpeople.

The same planters who opposed radical rule had grown comfortable with ruling themselves during Presidential Reconstruction. Under Johnson’s readmission policies, white landholders had been granted a wide berth that equated to unhindered latitude for the control and hire of laborers along with the creation of laws regulating freedpeople’s behavior and movements. Such elasticity meant that most former slaveholders maintained prewar behaviors toward freedpeople and that the legacy of slavery continued to inform the regulation of labor and plantation operations. Even the Freedmen’s Bureau acted as a proxy for planter power. Although former slaveholders had to submit to federal regulations, the Bureau nonetheless ensured a fairly constant stream of labor. Much of the planters’ postwar latitude of movement changed in the wake of the 1866 congressional elections, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, the passage of the Reconstruction Acts, and, in Louisiana, the July 30, 1866 Mechanics Hall riot in New Orleans.⁶⁵ The culmination of these events meant that 1867 dawned with a strong

⁶⁴ White, *The Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana*, 124–126. Yellow fever epidemics tended to commence in July or August and continue as late as December. For details see, Carrigan, “Impact of Epidemic Yellow Fever on Life in Louisiana,” and consult chapter 2 footnotes. It is believed that the 1867 epidemic began in Jamaica. For a parallel regarding working conditions of black Mississippi Delta sharecroppers and day laborers pre-World War One to post-World War Two and the role of government sponsored aid and new-fangled agricultural tools, see Nan Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: HUP, 2003).

⁶⁵ See Foner, *Reconstruction*; Martin Mantell, *Johnson, Grant, and the Politics of Reconstruction* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1973). On the Mechanics Hall riot as well as three other significant New Orleans street riots, see Hogue, *Uncivil War*. The Memphis riot of 1866 was also a significant motivator in the passage of the Reconstruction Acts. On that topic see Rosen, *Terror in the Heart*

Republican and radicalized contingent in Congress that pushed for a legislative agenda and hardline change that sought root and branch change across the defeated Confederacy. Now, Congress challenged Johnson and southern intransigence with a program of radical reform under the auspices of the U.S. army. In northwest Louisiana, where feelings toward the Union were tepid at best, these legislative events cemented planters' intense dislike, distrust, and ire towards the victorious North, and particularly Congress, and strengthened hatred and violence towards freedpeople, particularly in the aftermath of the Second Reconstruction Act, which placed Union troops in charge of voter registration in an effort to safeguard the voting rights of freedmen. Radical Reconstruction had arrived and it was met with white hostility along the Red River.

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was the first bill to state that all citizens were defended under the law and it defined the parameters of citizenship. A month after its passage, Joe Texada received a letter from a friend who was outraged at "the treachery of Johnson and others." He wrote that Johnson had been conquered by the Republicans and now, as Texada's friend had foretold, "not one of the rebel states will get admission to Congress whilst Johnson is in his seat excepts perhaps Tennessee and Arkansas."⁶⁶ This was to be the southern trajectory, with the former Confederacy excepting Tennessee divided into five military districts under martial control per the Reconstruction Acts. The remainder of the states had to draft a new constitution to meet approval by Congress and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment to gain readmission. Thomas Moore had hoped that the 1866 elections would "result successfully to the Democratic Party" so that the party would be united "as to have a majority and be the congress," but Louisiana soon found itself under military control, with Union troops safeguarding the newly established voting rights of former slaves, and with the most racially radical constitution of any state.⁶⁷

This radical state constitution was the final step for whites along the Red River. Crafted with the input of black members of the state government, it granted equal public and private rights to blacks and whites. Louisiana also found itself overrun with Union officers protecting the voting rights of black men under the Fifteenth Amendment and the civil rights of freedpeople under the Fourteenth Amendment. For whites, the situation had become unreal and the surge in large-scale public violence throughout the state signified an emboldened, outward manifestation of a longstanding malice towards blacks. Most white Louisianans heartily agreed with William Randolph, who wrote James Calvert Wise that "I would I had a hundred thousand

of Freedom. On Reconstruction Acts and division of the South into five regions see Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise*, chapter 9.

⁶⁶ D. Haynes to "Friend Texada," May 21, 1866, Lewis Texada Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC.

⁶⁷ Thomas Moore to James Calvert Wise, May 29, 1866, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. On the radical Louisiana constitution see Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718–1868* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), especially chapter 5. The full text of the constitution is available here: <https://archive.org/details/constitutionadop1868loui>

I would give it to put down negro equality. Negro supremacy.”⁶⁸ Indeed, politically catalyzed violence led to sharp surges of homicides that coincided with election years or campaigns to secure Democratic control, with the highest levels of violence in northern Louisiana concentrated in Bossier and Caddo.⁶⁹ Heeding Randolph’s call to “put down” equality, Red River whites seized the mantle of terror and intimidation. The public use and display of violence, which moved from the private sphere of the plantation to the public sphere of state politics, was used to “reduce and, hence, to manage” blacks on the plantation, at the ballot box, and in the political arena.⁷⁰ The politically fuelled nature of white-led violence after 1867 remained a key driver of vigilante activity in northwest Louisiana for several decades. The perfect storm of events, as perceived by regional whites, that rained on the white South by the fall of 1867 led to extraordinary levels and incidents of violence meted out by white southerners who found their world completely upended and who clung to violent activity as a means of exerting mastery and control over their black victims.⁷¹

Increased involvement in the political arena by Louisiana blacks and the upcoming 1868 presidential election incensed whites. Many began to conflate African American political privileges with perceived indolence and lowered labor output. If freedom had made blacks indolent and recalcitrant, many former planters believed that the vote made them still more unwieldy. Benjamin Cuny’s brother lived on the Texas side of the Red River and wrote that “the freedmen are very indolent” and the labor of three individuals was “equivalent to one during slavery.” He felt this was not helped by the profusion of “radical real (blue bellies)” in the area or by the presence of U.S. troops, who allowed freedpeople to push the narrow boundaries of their freedom. This emboldened Texan blacks too much and Stephen Cuny was aghast that “the people of Louisiana are in a worse condition.” The new 1868 constitution—a blueprint for radical rule, Eric Foner contends—underscored that blacks were “in the ascendant” and Cuny singled out the legal requirement for New Orleans public school to be “open alike to both black & white.”⁷² Like many former slaveholders, the Cuny brothers wondered how Louisiana’s days of “intelligence, pride & chivalry” had been replaced by “black republicans” with political clout, former slaves with access to the ballot, and “carpet baggers [to] govern the negro vote.”⁷³ The world was now properly turned upside down and the eagerness of

⁶⁸ William Randolph to Colonel Wise, August 1868, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. On public violence and riots in New Orleans see Hogue, *Uncivil War*. For discussion of politically driven violence in Louisiana’s Florida Parishes see Samuel Hyde, *Pistols and Politics: The Dilemma of Democracy in Louisiana’s Florida Parishes, 1810–1899* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1996).

⁶⁹ Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence*, 29, 49–50, 62.

⁷⁰ Joel Williamson, *A Rage For Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (NY: OUP, 1986), 152. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*.

⁷¹ Rabale, *But There Was No Peace*, xv, 3.

⁷² Stephen Cuny to Benjamin Cuny, October 4, 1868, Benjamin Philip Cuny Family Papers, Mss. 4246, LLMVC. Underlines in original. See also Foner, *Reconstruction*.

⁷³ Stephen Cuny to Benjamin Cuny, October 4, 1868, Benjamin Philip Cuny Family Papers, Mss. 4246, LLMVC (first quote); William Sharp to Joseph Pownall, August 16, 1870, William A. Sharp Letters, Mss. 4302, LLMVC (second quote). Underlines in original. On enforcement of the 15th amendment, enforcement acts, and freedmen voting see Everette Swinney, “Enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment, 1870–1877.” *JSH* 28, no 2 (May 1962): 202–218. On the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the 14th Amendment

freedpeople to be participants in the political sphere and elections terrified whites. All of the outward trappings of white superiority seemed to have slipped quickly from the firm grasp of white landowners as they watched them handed out to persons that they still viewed as property and racially inferior. The security and self-assuredness that had come part and parcel of slaveholding had now been ripped out from underfoot and replaced with what appeared to be a chaotic and amalgamated racial order that failed to provide sure footing for whites. As freedpeople joined the Republican Party in greater numbers and, along the Red River, attempted to exercise their right to the ballot box, whites turned to violence as a means to reassert control and bring order to the maelstrom of change. Few places in the entire American South were as violent as the Red River parishes and the names of regional white-led rampages became notorious as racial pogroms. The Coushatta, and above all Colfax, massacres were shameful episodes of white racial terror, but they were not exceptional or necessarily illogical outpouring of white enmity. Violence and public displays of violent power were deeply embedded aspects of Red River life and with the passage of the Reconstruction Acts, violence and terror were part of a vocabulary and a regional lexicon of white supremacy.

The violence that would engulf the region in the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction years was not foreign or an aberration from past behavior. However, the violent leanings and hatred of blacks had moved from a steady simmer to a rolling boil and without the financial and legal structures of enslavement to shape racial dynamics, the lid had come off the pot. Now, slaveholding mastery was replaced by an overt, visceral, and extremely personalized hatred of blacks. Under the power dynamics of slavery, Red River masters had frequently exercised their control over their chattel through violence and through the cold, detached manner in which they perceived slaves as laboring bodies best worked at full-tilt to cultivate cotton. That private sphere of control within the then-approved social construct of slavery, with the protections of federal and state law regarding their actions and ownership, was dismantled, and ex-slaveholders turned their vengeance outward. No longer valuable property, former slaves could be targeted as groups or singled out for violent retribution. The public, pervasive, and prevalent use of violence in the region was not alien to the political economy and culture of the region. White on black violence, however, derived from the fine-tuned racial hatred of blacks, which took the place of mastery as a means to control, subjugate, and subdue former slaves. It kept the violent, dehumanized, brutal elements of enslavement along the Red intact and redressed it in a visible, unapologetic, viscerally violent garb that empowered whites to kill freedpeople with alacrity and without impunity. This deeply entrenched contempt for black humanity, consistently carried from the antebellum period into Reconstruction manifested itself in the frequent killing of freedpeople throughout the region. Unmasked violence was used to

see Joe Gray Taylor, "Louisiana: An Impossible Task," in Otto Olsen, ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South* (Baton Rouge: LSUP, 1980), 206–208.

control the labor of freedpeople, as a deterrent for black voting, and to exercise and enforce white superiority. Black lives, Henry Adams recalled, were “ain’t no more than a chicken’s” in northwest Louisiana and the escalating, high profile displays of white supremacist violence in the region would have long lasting effects on the entire nation.⁷⁴

The deep-rooted hatred of freedpeople was an inheritance passed down through generations of slaveholders and protected and coddled in this region during the Civil War. The regularity of violent acts against freedpeople was one way in which whites sought “to restore as much as possible of the world they had lost” and, in this region, vigilante violence united white men of all classes.⁷⁵ The dislike and vitriol against blacks was lodged so deeply into the composition of the region that no real provocation was needed to incite violence; many murdered freedpeople were often victims purely by being in the wrong place. Defeat in the Civil War and the transformations brought by Reconstruction had maintained a cavernous space within the regional white identity for white supremacy to comfortably inhabit. Northern-driven reunification efforts in tandem with black emancipation served as fodder that not only disempowered Red River blacks politically and economically but also strengthened the “re-solidification” of white vigilante violence.⁷⁶ In this transformation, the regular use of race-based violence to enforce the power structure of the region moved from the longstanding, controlled arena of the plantation to the shared public spaces of riverbanks, town streets, and regional roads.

Indeed, violence was used throughout the region to reaffirm an entrenched commitment to white supremacy and its corollary, racial control. Whites from all classes wielded violence to reshape the contours of their postwar world—a world that was barely recognizable to them—and which upended antebellum strictures. Black male suffrage was accordingly met by politically driven violence meted out to black men, women, and children. Racial supremacy was so effective at unifying regional whites because it “built on words and ideas with deep histories” and reaffirmed white commitment to a race-based power structure that had undergirded the dynamic of the region since settlement.⁷⁷ White Leagues, bands of white supremacists that organized into militia and paramilitary groups throughout the South and were just as violent and often more effective than the Ku Klux Klan, were prevalent, organized, and very tightly

⁷⁴ Henry Adams testimony from Senate Report 693, 46th Congress, 2nd session, taken from Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen*, 437.

⁷⁵ Stephen Kantrowitz, “One Man’s Mob is Another Man’s Militia: Violence, Manhood, and Authority in Reconstruction South Carolina,” in Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: Southern Politics From Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton: PUP, 2000), 67. Unlike in South Carolina, there were few white Republicans in this region and thus very little support from them in the face of the violent onslaught. Here, white Republicans tended to be carpetbaggers and they were intimidated or subject to violence themselves, so they did not confront the Democratic majority to protect black civil rights.

⁷⁶ Edward Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865–1898* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2005), 6. See also Hogue, *Uncivil War*.

⁷⁷ Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, 4. Conversely, politically driven, predominantly white-on-white violence became a facet of life in the Florida parishes during and after Reconstruction. See Hyde, *Pistols and Politics*. On the class inclusive nature of southern white supremacy see Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1971); see Elaine Frantz Parsons, “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” *JAH* 92, no 3 (Dec 2005): 811–836.

connected to the Democratic Party. These Leagues had many members ensconced in political office and, as the armed extension of the Democrats, they possessed immense power within local politics and elections.⁷⁸ Nowhere was this truer than on Louisiana's Red River. On this western edge of the cotton frontier and Confederate holdout, southern whites remained committed to white supremacy, the power dynamics of slavery, and their continuous and unbroken legacies. It was kept ferociously alive, re-garbed in a rhetoric that encouraged violence and violent policing to maintain the narrow pathways out of slavery. This fine-tuned hatred and disregard for black lives replaced mastery within the regional white identity and served as the foundation for the systemic violence that engulfed the Red River.

Bloodshed was often a cold, calculated response to political involvement or black voting but it was also frequently the product of economic or socially driven factors and meted out on the spur of the moment and with no pretext. As the four 1874 incidents on Dr. Allances's DeSoto Parish holding indicate, white desire to claim a cultivated crop, challenge a labor dispute, or eliminate black Republicans often triggered violent acts, if not death, for free black laborers. In these four instances, white men or groups of armed whites "shot badly," "beat nearly to death," "beat and whipped," and "whipped" four freedmen before taking all of the crop. Elias Cornel beat a freedman "nearly to death" on his Bossier holding after the freedman completed agreed upon work and Cornel refused to pay.⁷⁹ Dr. Whitfield Vance took further steps; he gathered a group of nineteen white men to his plantation in broad daylight. They rounded up six black men on the plantation and killed four at Gum Springs, a few miles above Vance's plantation, and two in nearby Benton. On the plantation, they shot Henry Chambers three times at the gate and they killed one of the rounded up men—named Bob—on the road for being a radical. Vance thrust a large bowie knife into Bob's back and into his heart; Vance and his posse then made "the colored men kneel down about the deceased and look him in the eyes." Rounding up the remaining black men, the group continued to Benton where they came across two freedwomen on horseback; the women were ordered off their horses and hung by their lariat ropes on a nearby tree. Once dead, the captured black men were made to cut them down and leave them by the roadside, as they had been forced to do with Bob.⁸⁰ For these men and women, predatory acts of violence were random, chaotic, and derived from the slightest infringement. Even crossed words were enough to trigger intimidation, as freedman Daniel Robinson discovered. Like others who gradually shifted toward tenant farming in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Robinson made a contract to work thirty acres near Shreveport belonging to Colonel Stephen Jones. Robinson made four bales of cotton, three hundred bushels of corn, and five hundred bushels of sweet potatoes but was refused payment. When Robinson noticed and approached his landlord about Jones's use of tools that belonged to Robinson, the freedman was

⁷⁸ See Hogue, *Uncivil War*; Trelease, *White Terror*; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*.

⁷⁹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 165.

⁸⁰ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 390.

threatened by Jones's son, which prompted Robinson to seek employment on a nearby plantation. He left all of his belongings "locked up in my house" on the Jones holding, only to discover that Jones "broke into my house," stole personal items and claimed tools. Robinson was afraid to enter his own home during the day for fear of being shot and was only able to secure personal items under the cover of darkness.⁸¹

Robinson's situation was experienced in iterations by many regional freedpeople who faced violence and prejudice in equal measure. Seizing tools and crops, denying pay, and physically assaulting black bodies underscored the key white perception that blacks were laboring bodies, without right to property or worthy of pay, and that violence and the threat of violence would be employed to assert white dominance over the African American community. The testimony gathered by military personnel from DeSoto Parish noted that there were daily complaints from freedpeople "of being maltreated, threatened, and driven terror-struck from their homes and crops." Paltry numbers of incidents elicited investigation by local law authorities, while freedpeople were "systematically plundered of their crops and driven away from their homes." Personal violence and death threats occurred at such a high rate that, as Major Lewis Merrill of the Seventh Cavalry wrote from Shreveport, "it is not an exaggeration to say that the entire black population of this section is absolutely terror-struck." Those that did remain in their homes and worked the land did so with near constant "apprehension of the visits of and violence . . . of White Leaguers."⁸² Throughout the Red River region, for the duration of Radical Reconstruction, there are an overwhelming number of instances of freedpeople being brutalized and threatened in connection with cultivation or repossession of cotton. It caused familial separations, property loss, injury, and death among black Louisianans who faced an atmosphere of fear and political intimidation that narrowed the border between slavery and freedom.⁸³

Former slave Henry Adams compiled his own experiences as well as those of other freedpeople from 1866 until 1875 in his Congressional testimony. In great detail, Adams enumerated the myriad ways in which the passageways out of slavery were constricted by Red River whites. He had seen a dead "colored man hanging to a limb about six miles from Shreveport," a "colored man's head laying side of the road" on his way to Summer Grove in Caddo Parish, and had seen black men's heads on stakes along the road that ran west from Shreveport. He learned that the black men had been brought to this spot from Shreveport and killed, with their decapitated heads left as potent reminders of white vitriol and power. Adams

⁸¹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 190–191. On the legal status of sharecroppers see Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 157; Foner, *Reconstruction*; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*.

⁸² *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 193. Merrill wrote from the headquarters district of upper Red River to the Assistant Adjutant-General of the Department of the Gulf. See page 36 for example of being run off land for crop seizure; page 34 on crop stealing; page 59 for Henry Turner's testimony regarding repossession of his timber and being run off his land, despite having documents to prove ownership of his holding. There are numerous lists detailing brutalities throughout *Use of the Army In Certain of the Southern States* including on pages 416–427 and 441–450. On the creation of a voluntary state militia and the decline of military personnel in Red River see Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 68–74.

⁸³ For countless additional examples of the above see *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*.

described how white men continued to employ the whip “as they did before freedom,” often riding through cotton fields with bullwhips in their hands. The return of the bullwhip echoed throughout the gathered testimonies and evidence held in the Congressional report. As former slaves lamented the brutal dehumanization and decimation of their race, whites ascribed the “deplorable conditions” of Radical Reconstruction to the freedoms of blacks, black suffrage, and the Republican ticket. Newspapers declared that former slaves, “creatures” in white parlance, “do not respect their creators” and that throughout Louisiana the “ignorant usurp the places of the intelligent, and the pure.” This firm belief meant that Adams and other ex-Union soldiers were targeted and subjected to violence and intimidation in vigilante efforts to reset the power balance. Black Union army veterans were commonly singled out and mercilessly beaten and often threatened with death. The presence of armed black men and the potential that former soldiers would “spoil the other negroes”—making domination, control, and reassertion of mastery difficult—truly terrified whites. As with their contempt for Union veterans, former slaveholders were fearful that “negroes will get above their business” and thus they restricted and censored what black preachers could preach. More often, however, no reason was needed at all to kill freedpeople. Adams, who had joined the Union army in 1866 at Shreveport, testified that in 1866 alone he had seen ten to fifteen freedpeople floating in the Red River. They had been killed in various ways: “some hung by the neck; sides of old logs; some with ropes round his necks. Some was shot and some throats were cut.” The Red was frequently used as a watery tomb and as a torture device for freedpeople. On the plantations from Shreveport to Alexandria, Adams saw gratuitous acts of racial torture with white men pushing freedmen into the river with ropes around their hands or necks, sometimes being hauled back to shore by the rope. It was common practice for steamboats heading to Shreveport to knock blacks overboard, whip and beat them, or run them off the boat mid-river after paying fares.⁸⁴

Though contracts were used to lock freedpeople in as laborers, these agreements did not ensure payment in full by white landowners or protect African Americans from violence. George Underwood, Benjamin Harris, and Isiah Fuller, for instance, made a contract to work and make a crop on Mr. McMoring’s place. One day in July while they were working in the field, McMoring and another white man forced them to leave the place by coming after them with guns and sticks—despite protestations from the three men about leaving their homes and the crop behind without any compensation. The three men were due \$180 from McMoring and

⁸⁴ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 409–416. Adams’ testimony is the longest inclusive piece in the Congressional document by a freedperson. Undated newspaper article, Vallie J. Rozier Scrapbook, Mss. 879, LLMVC. For details on Adams’ military service see <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1129.htm>. Many other testimonies and letters in *Use of the Army* describe the Red as a repository for bodies. The Red as a tool of violence utilized by whites is also discussed in Vandal, “Bloody Caddo,” footnote 34; Vandal, *Rethinking Southern Violence*. For discussion of Reconstruction violence in Rabl, *But There Was No Peace*; Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*; Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*; Foner, *Reconstruction*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Stephan Budiansky, *The Bloody Shirt: Terror After Appomattox* (NY: Viking, 2008); Carole Emberton, *Beyond Redemption: Race, Violence, and the American South After the Civil War* (Chicago: UCP, 2013); Trelease, *White Terror*. For discussion of the emotional and sensory impact of pain, violence, and brutality see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (NY: OUP, 1985); Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (NY: Picador, 2003). On lynching, torture, and visual spectacle see Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2011).

were not compensated by the terms of their contract. They noted that they had “worked for them as though we were slaves, and then treated like dogs all the time.”⁸⁵ As a literate ex-slave, Adams was uniquely positioned to judge the plight of freedpeople like Underwood, Harris, and Fuller. Indeed, he was able to review contract papers, cotton receipts, and accounts and in 1869 he discovered that 35 freedpeople had been cheated out of \$1790. Those freedpeople who went to the law to press home their claims “got killed and some got good whippings,” Adams testified. In subsequent years, Adams and other discharged soldiers looked over contracts and again found that contracted freedpeople were cheated out of “two-thirds of their just and right of what they had made.” None of the accounts settled up. Blacks that confronted their white employers about these obvious discrepancies were whipped, sent to jail, or had their cotton and corn seized. The practice of underpaying freedpeople endured in other locations too. Adams recounted the common Shreveport store practice of giving incorrect change to freedpeople. Since the majority of black individuals were illiterate and “could not count [his] money,” local storeowners and landowners would fail to give a freedperson “half of [his] money back” when paying or changing money.⁸⁶ The plentiful statements of non-literate freedpeople that detail being cheated out of or finding themselves short of money after making payments underscores the deceitful steps taken by local whites to seize any symbol of black ownership or property and to reduce blacks to witless, naïve ciphers who could be robbed at will. Theft, like the brutal intimidation of black bodies, reinforced the dominion of white over black and stripped freedpeople of their money and autonomy.

Freedpeople faced brutality for every conceivable reason. Robert Parks was beaten over the head with a gun for being in a grocery store; Samuel Smith was beaten, whipped, and “blooded like a hog” for attending church without white permission; Eliza Sanders was badly whipped by her white employer for not working “to suit him”; Patsey McCrady was accused of pulling a watermelon and thus badly whipped; George Vinson was killed for attending the Methodist church in Keatchie; Ardinire Taylor was cut badly with a knife when she would not agree to sleep with the white landowner.⁸⁷ Mrs. Beckey Robson was whipped and beaten over the head with a gun when she went to find out why white men had seized her son. White men who intended to kill him had taken him to a plantation two miles from Shreveport and Mrs. Robson had walked to rescue her son. Beckey Robson and Ardinire Taylor were not the only freedwomen to face invasive attacks on their families and their physical and emotional beings. Miss Catherine was badly whipped by a white man traveling on the road to Shreveport who had demanded she make him dinner without any compensation. Joe Caslie, by contrast, was accused

⁸⁵ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 167.

⁸⁶ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 409–416. For additional examples of discrepancies in pay versus amount cropped see Marcelin Tauzin and Family Papers, Mss. 912, LLMVC. For many former slaveholders, the halcyon days of profit were behind them. This loss of financial prowess in addition to mastery compounded the enmity towards freedpeople. For an example of planter financial struggles see Bank of Louisiana to Mrs. Harriet Mathew, November 11, 1872; Crop Pledge for Debts, Cammack & Co to Mrs. Penelope Mathews, April 25, 1874, Mathews-Ventress-Lawrason Family Papers, Mss. 4358, LLMVC.

⁸⁷ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 416–418.

of stealing meat and thus run off his property and separated from his sole means of economic independence, the crop growing on his small holding; Henry Simon was beaten and whipped and accused of stealing three dollars, which he had to pay his white employer; Hawood Tansey was severely beaten after refusing to throw corn in the crib as directed by a white man; James Molitneri was beaten for not starting work as soon as he was commanded to; Dock Puese was killed, tied like a hog and burnt because he had been sick and was thus unable to work; Miss Williams was killed by a white woman because she would not call her mistress.⁸⁸ Name after name, infraction after perceived infraction, black men and women were cut down, run off, harassed, beaten, robbed, or murdered.

Another tactic popular along the Red was to force black children back into a slavery-like debt peonage to work off a debt that white men claimed was owed by the children's families. Adams recalled that ten families in Caddo Parish had their children taken from them and that two children in DeSoto Parish had been taken, one for \$50 and one for nothing.⁸⁹ Aping the mores of an antebellum slave auction, the \$50 ransom cheapened and devalued black life and once again turned blacks into property. It revealed the startlingly similar ways in which postbellum landlords continued to separate families and exert pressures in ways not dissimilar to those under slavery. Eighteen-year-old Zion Buggers was stolen from his parents, tied to a mule, and taken towards Texas. His parents, Friday and Ussless, testified that Zion chewed through the ropes that bound him in order to return home. Sam Thomplin had lived and worked on John Long's plantation. When Thomplin refused to work on the plantation another year, Long claimed a debt of \$50 before then proceeding to take Thomplin's milk cow, bale of cotton weighing 450 pounds, 50 bushels of corn, a double-barreled shotgun, and a singletree as payment. However, the debt collection didn't stop, and when Thomplin moved to Shreveport, Long followed him and engaged a constable to take Thomplin's fifteen-year-old daughter for the sum of \$50. Parental testimony revealed that Black Bayou on the outskirts of Monroe, over one hundred miles east from Shreveport, was a favored destination to re-enslave children. Ten children from Caddo were taken in 1873. The children were held there for debts of various sums and their white captors threatened the parents with death if rescue was attempted. One family noted that although their children had been taken in 1868 and were still in captivity and since there was no law that would "make them give us our children." Shockingly, this practice continued unabated with theft, seizure, and monetary value being assigned to black children.⁹⁰

Crops, debt, and not satisfactorily submitting to white dominance were all prime catalysts for violence, but endemic white rage was often set off without a particular trigger. The constant, simmering, fine-tuned hatred of freedpeople meant that whites killed, beat, and whipped blacks purely out of disdain for their humanity and existence. The Congressional

⁸⁸ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 416–445.

⁸⁹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 415.

⁹⁰ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 422, 431, 441. For discussion of naming practices see chapter 2.

report compiled under orders in 1876 and presented the following year from President Ulysses Grant, who was investigating the rise in vigilante led violence throughout the South, lists incident after incident in which freedpeople were killed because of their skin color. In multiple cases, the dead are not inhabitants of the parish—having traveled there from a neighboring parish or from out of state—and so the record of their life and death curtly proclaims unknown blacks killed. Being black, free, and in the path of an outraged white was often a death sentence. The Fullilove family—who migrated to the region during the cotton boom—had remained on their holdings scattered around Shreveport. Thomas Fullilove, whose father Jas Fullilove had begun the familial migration to the rich-soiled Red River, frequently lashed out at the freedpeople who lived and worked on his land. These freedpeople had likely been his family property and the constant reminder of that loss of property, pride, and identity manifested in bloody acts. In 1872, Georgian Poke was beaten over the head by Fullilove while Aaron Walker was assaulted by Fullilove’s overseer on Fullilove’s land.⁹¹ Thomas’s brother James beat John William in 1873 and James’ son James Hill Fullilove whipped Mary Johnson “nearly to death” on his father’s plantation in 1872. The younger Fullilove believed Johnson had eaten an apple from a tree and whipped her until the blood ran from head to heels. James Hill’s brother severely whipped Fairy White, who worked on his plantation in 1874. The trajectory of postwar violence on Fullilove holdings was long and bloody; a Fullilove had also killed Elie Hawkins in 1868 en route to jail the freedman for some unrecorded offense.⁹²

Economic and socially driven violence fomented an atmosphere of fear and claimed the lives of hundreds of freedpeople along the Red, but political violence and vote restricting assaults were the primary triggers for vigilante activities. Restricting black access to the ballot box and to the political arena, in local to national elections, was crucial to whites throughout the state and particularly in the Red River region. With the onset of Radical Reconstruction, the southern political landscape markedly divided along racial lines, with southern whites collected in the Democratic camp while freedpeople followed the party of Lincoln. Reports at the time estimated that 3,500 people had been killed in Louisiana in politically inspired violence since 1865 and that 1,880 of those deaths had resulted from efforts to prevent Louisiana freedmen from voting.⁹³ Politically motivated vigilante actions gained more traction and momentum from earlier complaints that freedpeople were insolent, difficult to control, resistant to labor and

⁹¹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 418. The family tree for Tabitha and Jas Fullilove’s branch of the family can be found in Family History, Fullilove Family Ancestry, Samford C. Fullilove Papers, Collection 256, LSUS.

⁹² *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 431.

⁹³ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 2. Carpetbaggers, the derogatory slang term for Northerners who moved to the South following the Civil War, also formed the white Republican voting block in the South. Dosia Williams Moore, whose family relocated to the Colfax environs in the 1840s from South Carolina, described the carpetbagger thus: “As so often happens during political crisis, a low type of white man know as “carpet-baggers” insinuated themselves into positions of responsibility and trust...they drove the aristocracy of the south to acts of desperation.” See Wells, ed., *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River: The Memoirs of Dosia Williams Moore* (Ruston: McGinty Publications, 1990), 61. On the party machinations and Northerners in the South postwar see Levine, *Fall of the House of Dixie*; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*; Taylor, “Louisiana: An Impossible Task,” in Olsen, ed., *Reconstruction and Redemption in the South*; Perman, *The Road to Redemption*; Perman, *Reunion Without Compromise*; Carter, *When the War Was Over*; Blum, *Reforging the White Republic*; John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction After the Civil War* (Chicago: UCP, 2013); Foner, *Reconstruction*.

movement restrictions. Then, with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and the establishment of the Reconstruction Acts, a “discourse of black predation” emerged that rallied white Democrats behind a delegitimization of Republican control of the South, black citizenship, and black voting. The black vote, political involvement, and right to bear arms became decisive rallying points for white violence and paramilitary action.⁹⁴

The upheavals of the post 1868 political environment in Louisiana provided an impetus for whites throughout the state to draw upon their Confederate army experience to form armed vigilante units. Throughout Louisiana, ex-Confederates regrouped into their companies and harnessed that wartime commitment to clamp down on black political involvement, affiliation, and voting. Louisiana was one of three southern states with a black population that surpassed white and this translated into a large voting populace of freedmen, particularly along the Mississippi River where large free communities continued to work cotton and sugar cane fields. The sheer number of potential Republican votes orchestrated by Louisiana freedmen—apart from the idea of blacks voting at all—prompted whites to leverage their collective military experience to clamp down on black access to political information and the ballot box. The ready-made framework of Confederate military experience allowed white supremacists to organize quickly and with a precision and knowledge that made them even more dangerous.⁹⁵ This paramilitary organizing was particularly successful and effectively deployed in both the urban and rural regions of Louisiana. In the upper reaches of the state, notably in the Red River region, the “restraints of the law” were little felt or respected; planters could direct their vehemence pointedly at freedpeople—as laborers and as voters—and at white Republicans.

Violence and politics became two halves of a whole as radical rule gave way and both southern and federal authorities began their retreat from Reconstruction. This unhealthy symbiotic relationship was driven by an overwhelming desire on the behalf of regional whites to return “poor Louisiana unfortunate Louisiana” to its antebellum racial positioning.⁹⁶ Violence became a recognizable trait of the regional white identity, filling a space in the race-based power structure. This distorted power structure, like slavery before it, provided a platform on which whites could see and shape themselves in the upturned world they were struggling to navigate. It became a tangible method to reassert white control with visual, undeniable results. So endemic was violence that throughout the Red River region, white supremacy and vigilante activity did not hide behind costumes or use nighttime to shroud their enterprise. Instead, these occurrences were public, commonplace, and popular with and supported by the white community. For the most part, they also operated without risk of arrest. The weak grip of

⁹⁴ Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 155.

⁹⁵ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 4, 11–12, 49–52, 125. *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 383. As Hogue’s book details, these paramilitary tactics were also utilized during four street battles in New Orleans. Of particular importance during the New Orleans riots as well as at Colfax and Coushatta was the premium places on “the ability to assemble, strike quickly, and then disperse before either the state militia or federal troops could respond (125).” See also Elaine Frantz Parson, “Klan Skepticism and Denial in Reconstruction-Era Public Discourse,” *JSH* 77, no 1 (February 2011): 53–90

⁹⁶ B. Haines to James Calvert Wise, September 30, 1871, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC.

federal troops and federal legal officials meant that whites like Fullilove could continue to act with impunity. It was the success of vigilantism and the failure of radical rule to secure due process and to put any bite behind the threat of justice that enable race-based violence to continue unchecked. In a missive to the “gentlemen” of Alexandria, former colonel and quartermaster James Calvert Wise pushed for continuous efforts and attention to “the negro question.” Wise, who would head the Rapides Parish militia in 1873, cautioned against “inaction at this particular time” and declared that white men needed to “follow up their late success” in order to wholly “control the negro element to suit themselves.” In conjunction with enmity-based bloodshed, Wise and others like him proposed that landowners continue to constrain and debilitate blacks through control of land. Wise noted that “as capitalist and owners of the soil” planters should withhold leasing land to blacks since this would “elevate them to . . . proprietors.”⁹⁷ African Americans, Wise averred, should be kept as dependent laborers in order to be perfectly controlled. Wise’s advice to Alexandria’s gentlemen echoed that proposed by pro-white political pamphlets of the day. One, entitled “Shall Capital Own Labor” envisioned a new South in which blacks would be re-enslaved, southern debts would be repudiated and union with the North severed, with a return to “a glorious austocracy.”⁹⁸ This stridently pro-white, pro-Confederate, and wholly unreconstructed Democratic vision—based on autocratic authority—would only be possible through the continued campaign of politically motivated intimidation and violence, and Red River whites rose to the challenge.

The political situation in Louisiana was a source of ire and despair for former slaveholders. The leadership, the new laws, and inclusion of freedpeople in the electoral process prompted fear and anger from whites about the political direction of the state. For them, the provisions for black male citizenship, voting rights, equal schools and services for freedpeople were major factors that made the “political status” in Louisiana “deplorable.” Thomas Powell could not hide his distaste for the political status quo when he noted that freedmen would habitually “concentrate so that they can [have] a voice in the government.”⁹⁹ The fear of concentrated black votes was echoed by Wise’s friend, who wrote that a district “may be carried by the “niggers” for they have from 50 to 60 majority in the registration.”¹⁰⁰ The dense voting power of freedpeople fueled white ire and subsequent violent episodes.

Although Republicans and most Northerners did not believe in an agenda of complete equality and were not proponents of integration, they understood the implication of having freedpeople’s voting support. The vast turnout and mobilization of black voters appealed to Republicans but conjured nightmares for Democrats. Black enfranchisement sparked a “war of

⁹⁷ James Calvert Wise to “Gentlemen”, November 11, 1868, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. For Wise’s militia appointment in 1873 and appointment to parish representative in 1881, see the oversize items in the collection.

⁹⁸ “Shall Capital Own Labor,” undated political pamphlet, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC.

⁹⁹ Thomas Powell to “Dear Cousin Mary,” May 6, 1873, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. Underlines present in original.

¹⁰⁰ B. Haines to James Calvert Wise, September 30, 1871, James Calvert Wise Papers, Mss. 3239, LLMVC. Underlines present in original.

color” in the Red River, a war that would permeate black daily life and shrink the angles that freedpeople had on freedom.¹⁰¹ The high-profile battles of this war would have far reaching implications throughout the country for decades to come. To prepare themselves for the ensuing fight, whites acted alone or organized in informal groups, joining the White Leagues or the Knights of the White Camelia—a very popular Louisiana vigilante group. Contemporaries described the League as “but the infamous “Klan” under a new name; it is led by the same men, the little great men of the rotten confederacy.” In large groups and individually, white men seriously heeded the call of the *Shreveport Times* and exercised their “manly qualities” to intimidate blacks and ensured that “everyone will know what we want.”¹⁰² Intimidation began firmly in city hall. The mayor of Alexandria appointed a group of fifty men to serve as special police during the 1868 election. He had the firearms of Republicans confiscated but Democrats were rewarded with a red ribbon denoting their status as officers of authority. Thus, all Democrats were armed, given badges of authority, and charged with intimidating Republicans. To compound matters, corruption and electoral fraud was rife with between 400 and 500 votes cast in the municipal election in Alexandria despite the total number of legal voters in the city being less than 200. Witnesses recounted that white men who lived twenty and thirty miles from Alexandria voted, and, predictably enough, they voted Democrat.¹⁰³ The targeted political violence that occurred in Alexandria and elsewhere in northwest Louisiana would, like similar episodes of racial violence in South Carolina and other parts of the South, make a definitive public display of white power while thwarting attempts at black mobilization before elections.¹⁰⁴

The majority of whites found no fault with the actions and measures taken in the name of white power. They felt, like Sargent W. Metly, that Democrats were justified in killing “pretty fast” the freedpeople who were exercising their new powers. Metly and others believed that without these actions, blacks would be allowed “the full rights of a white man,” which would turn whites into slaves.¹⁰⁵ For Metly and his ilk, white vigilantism protected and secured the racial muddsill that had heretofore maintained racial hierarchies. The muddsill thesis, famously introduced into southern political discourse by James Henry Hammond, posited that slavery was a positive good since institutionalized bondage prevented—in legal, social, and ideological terms—any white man from descending to the bottom section of the social pyramid. Slaves, and

¹⁰¹ Thomas Powell to “Dear Cousin Mary,” July 2, 1872, Hubbard S. Bosley Papers, Mss. 963, LLMVC. See Parsons, “Klan Skepticism” on the role of newspapers in this prolonged war.

¹⁰² Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 173–174; *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 381. The KKK was active in Alexandria, where they paraded in the streets and destroyed the offices of the Republican newspaper (*Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 170). On northwest Louisiana and the Knights of the White Camelia see Allie Bayne Windham Webb, “Organization and Activities of the Knights of the White Camelia in Louisiana, 1867–1869,” *North Louisiana Historical Association Newsletter* 6, issue 4 (August 1966): 1–5. On how the performative aspects of the Klan and other vigilante groups allowed whites to craft an alternate identity for themselves and to present to other whites, see Elaine Frantz Parsons, “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan,” *JAH* 92, no 3 (Dec 2005): 811–836.

¹⁰³ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 339.

¹⁰⁴ Kantrowitz, “One Man’s Mob,” 79.

¹⁰⁵ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 81.

only slaves, occupied the base of society. In this postbellum world, the races could now pass each other, with whites and blacks rising and falling, muddying the racial categories, and destroying the rigid binaries of the antebellum era. Although vigilantism could not restore the assured fixity of those racial binaries, it provided a common medium for all white males, irrespective of class. Racial violence and vigilantism provided and established a unifying structure to white supremacy. That White Leagues were open and inclusive to all white males allowed racially supremacist ideals to bind whites together in the face of the incipient black challenge. In a bold statement titled “The White League” in an 1874 edition of *The Shreveport Times*, the taxpayer’s association of Mooringsport resolved “in the spirit of self-defense and protection of themselves and property” to acknowledge no party lines or political distinctions except those made by “distinctions of virtue and intelligence against crime and ignorance.” They went further by a resolution that urged the organization “of the white people under the party organization known as the White League,” and attributed all of the political, economic, and social problems to “*white carpet-baggers*” manipulating freedpeople. Local whites, the Caddo Parish paper urged, should “*strike this evil*” even if that required “*desperate measures*.” Another *Shreveport Times* article declared that Democrats could not be defeated by “political scoundrels” and the preservation of “society and of civil liberty” hinged on unified white action. They felt that the lives of carpetbaggers and radical Louisiana politicians were valueless in comparison to the principle of justice and liberty. For Red River whites, white supremacy accordingly emerged as the key to regional salvation and an essential step in the preservation of core benchmarks to white identity: mastery over blacks, control of black labor and mobility, and total political and racial supremacy.¹⁰⁶

By the late 1860s, the political environment in the Red River region was so hostile to Republicans that W. Mudgett, a Union man, noted that he could not remain in Shreveport unless “protected by militia, or some other force”—a statement corroborated by the military commander, General Flood. Indeed, both stated that armed men patrolled Shreveport’s streets, threatening violence to radicals and issuing constant threats to any man who voted for Grant in the 1868 presidential election.¹⁰⁷ Blacks who attended a Republican meeting in Mansfield, the site of the Confederate rout four years earlier, were fined twenty-five cents for every hour they attended the meeting. Harvey Twitchell, a prominent white Republican in Coushatta who would lose family members and most of his limbs as a result of the Coushatta massacre, wrote that no Republican could make a speech or act openly about the party in DeSoto “except at extreme risk of his life.”¹⁰⁸ Solomon Thomas, a Shreveport freedman, testified “republicans, white or colored, cannot live in Caddo Parish without the risk of being killed at any minute, day or

¹⁰⁶ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 375-376. Emphasis in original. See also pages 194, 385–389 for more examples of pro-white newspaper. Mooringsport was an area with a high level of violence.

¹⁰⁷ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 159-160.

¹⁰⁸ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 276 (first item), 251 (second).

night.” Thomas recalled an incident where a local man attempted to kill him; after searching for the hidden Thomas for several hours with “a squad of white men” to no avail, the man declared to a gathered crowd that whenever they encountered a “radical nigger that would not “give in”” they should shoot him down. Other city leaders seconded this order. Thomas’s intelligence was that every black person in Caddo had been forced to vote the Democratic ticket. To ensure unanimous black voting, Caddo whites took the firearms of every freedperson and also maintained a steady stream of violent and public murders. Mudgett wrote to Governor Warmouth imploring him to send “at least two mounted regiments” to Caddo because of a complete lack of “safety for life and property” for any person who disagreed “politically with the democracy of Caddo.” A “strong militia force,” he continued, was needed to combat the strong paramilitary forces entrenched in the parish. James Madison Cutts, who served as commander of the 5th military district at Shreveport, recognized that paramilitarism wrought chaos and bloodshed. He wrote a colleague that the region could not be maintained, nor security enforced, without “continued military occupation” and an increased military force.¹⁰⁹ Anti-Republican sentiment was so severe that freedman Sinclair Potter left Shreveport because of the danger inherent in being Republican. There were no Republican meetings held in Shreveport for at least one month before the 1868 presidential election and Potter estimated that at least twelve black men he knew had left the city because of political intimidation and oppression.¹¹⁰

Political affiliation provided a perfect flashpoint for vigilantism. Being known as a Republican freedman was reason enough to fear for one’s life. Freedman Moses Lawhorn was dragged from his home and murdered; his head was chopped off “to make sure he was dead.” The provocation for his death was that he was a Republican. Another freedman, L. James, hoped that a change would soon be brought by the Grant administration so that blacks would not “be murdered for being loyal to the Government.”¹¹¹ Eli Allen was hauled from his home near Coushatta and killed a mile from the town because of his Republican sentiments. His body was found with arms and legs broken, his torso riddled with bullets, and his head disfigured from fire. Taylor, a freedman with a political position in DeSoto, was beaten to death with clubs in Shreveport. Eugene Staës, the judge of the second municipal police court in New Orleans, recorded the statement of Fletcher Legardy for the Congressional investigation into Louisiana violence. Legardy had spent 24 of his 31 years living in Caddo and was acutely aware of the political tenor of the parish, both as a resident and as secretary of a Republican club. Legardy testified that freedpeople had been “intimidated in every possible way” in order to prevent their participation in political matters. The violent measures adopted by local Caddo whites included, but were not limited to, murder by shooting, hanging, and burning; “wounded with shot, knives,

¹⁰⁹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 280; James Madison Cutts to Thomas Ewing, August 7, 1867, James Madison Cutts Letter, Mss. 4856, LL MVC. In the same letter Cutts writes that the country was being turned over to black men. It is not clear if he means Louisiana or the entire United States in his use of country.

¹¹⁰ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 359, 380.

¹¹¹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 370.

bludgeons and whips”; driven out by intimidation; and following the congressional elections in 1874, he estimated that 400 freedpeople had been discharged from jobs because of their political affiliation and political symbolism.¹¹² Murdered and mutilated, hung or decapitated, local whites wished to figuratively and literally erase the black presence and reinscribe white authority over independent black bodies, while severing the black political head from the laboring black body. In Caddo, described by federal soldiers as a “bloody parish” with a “history of blood and crime,” murder was commonplace irrespective of the presence of federal troops. One night, thirty freedmen were taken from Shreveport, marched to the banks of the Red, tied together with ropes, and shot in the back. This raft of dead bodies strung together drifted down the river until alligators consumed the freedmen’s bodies and gave them “a burial denied by men.” These men were killed for political affiliation, as were the seven men who were chained together to an abandoned building that was then set alight. One testimony figured that 242 blacks had been murdered in Caddo and Bossier between September 1 and November 3, 1868 on the basis of political leanings alone. In the 1868 presidential election a mere ten votes were cast in northwest Louisiana for Republican candidate Grant.¹¹³ The “spirit of the emancipation proclamation” had not and would not infiltrate the process of power that controlled the Red River region.

The intention of blacks to vote coupled with their party affiliation further galvanized white supremacists. Violence was employed during the entire election period in order to reduce and stultify black participation and discourage African Americans from exercising the franchise. The depoliticalization of blacks—and their figurative and literal severance from the body politic—quashed their political voice from the electoral landscape while also underscoring that political power would be kept from their reach. On the Red River, whites kept blacks from the polls by force, but they also destroyed Republican tickets and tampered with the returns.¹¹⁴ In DeSoto Parish vigilantes made death threats towards every man who would vote for Ulysses Grant in 1868. W. Phillips testified that there was no “fairness and but little freedom” during the election cycle for freedpeople, who were often “constrained through fear” against voting or forced to vote “contrary to their judgment.” The practice of forced voting was substantiated in the statement of Henry Parker, Joe Lewis, and William Lewis, all of Caddo Parish. During the state and parish elections of 1868, these three freedmen were ambushed by seven white men armed with six-shooters, and ordered to go to the polls and vote the Democratic ticket “or they would kill us.” When the freedmen objected and stated that they would only vote for the candidates they wanted, the white posse retorted “you shall vote the democratic ticket to-day, or

¹¹² *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 251, 283, 361.

¹¹³ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 379–380. The bloody tactics and methods for deterring and making voting nearly impossible for Republicans are detailed on pages 380–382. See also Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*; Foner, *Reconstruction*; Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: UCAP, 2005); Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, Williamson, *A Rage For Order*; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, Hogue, *Uncivil War*.

¹¹⁴ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 153–154; Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 153–154, 175.

die,” before dragging the freedmen under duress to and from the polls. The coercion and compulsion did not end at the ballot box. Two weeks later, the posse returned to the freedmen’s abode and commenced shooting before sunrise.¹¹⁵ Solomon Thomas, a freedman in Shreveport, likewise recalled that every black in Caddo had to vote the Democratic ticket and that the polls were “surrounded with armed white men; bands of them went to every colored man’s house.” He continued that the only black man who voted the radical ticket in the 1868 election was twenty-three-year-old James Watson, who was killed by his former master’s son. Watson was not an officer of any political clubs or vocal about politics but was shot three times because he voted for Grant. It was also a frequent occurrence for freedmen to be severely whipped and otherwise brutalized during elections.¹¹⁶ Henry Adams recalled that armed white men stood around the ballot box during the November 1874 election in Caddo. The men dared blacks to vote the Republican ticket under penalties ranging from being run off their homes or forced to leave crops they had cultivated, to death. Adams also witnessed 125 blacks turned off the plantations where they labored after voting for the Republican ticket.¹¹⁷ As Adams well recognized, Republican leanings were tantamount to a death sentence in Red River. Freedman William Harper stated that “these outrages and murders” were so frequent and “from long custom” that they excite little public notice or interest and that an accurate tabulation of the crimes and victims would be impossible.¹¹⁸ Red River planters were not new to racial violence; as in the antebellum era when slave punishment likewise elicited little commentary, the long and customary tradition of white on black violence endured long into Reconstruction. Indeed, the numerous testimonies of violence, intimidation, and the murder of hundreds of local blacks provide considerable evidence to deeply-rooted racial enmity in this uppermost finger of the cotton South.

Black Republicans were not the only people to fear vigilantism and ostracization in the region. Elsie Breda wrote an anxious and frightened letter to her husband, Earnest, a white Republican in Natchitoches a few days prior to the Colfax Massacre, in April 1873. Her husband’s political allegiance had placed her in a precarious position and threatened their status and safety. She wrote that he should “give up all these political ideas” not because of respect for his wife and family or because of their diminished monetary capacity. Instead, she begged him to “leave the radicals” because his politics had made enemies and he had been abandoned by all of his friends. A public move away from the Republicans would ensure the safety of Breda and

¹¹⁵ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 335, 360. On hopes of Grant carrying Louisiana and black fidelity to Grant see Charles Boothby to “My Dear Mother,” May 18, 1872, Charles W. Boothby Papers, Mss. 4847, LLMVC.

¹¹⁶ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 359, 420. Use of the Army is filled with examples of this brutality.

¹¹⁷ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 415. In his testimony, William Harper—like Adams and fellow freedman Fletcher Legardy—stated that many freedpeople had been killed because of their political assertions. Harper estimated over 300 freedpeople.

¹¹⁸ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 361.

his family.¹¹⁹ Breda was fortunate that the color of his skin provided an element of protection against the ire that his political standing drew from regional whites. Red River freedpeople were not bequeathed the same understanding and their political allegiance and support would provide the catalyst for myriad killings, coercions, and acts of violence throughout Reconstruction.

Voting intimidation and interference was an overwhelming issue with a significant impact, particularly in light of laws that empowered the returning board to discard the polls from any precinct wherein violence or intimidation occurred. E. J. Barrett, a Republican who served as U.S. Marshall on voting day 1872, testified in 1873 that on election day everything “passed of quietly and without any disturbance” and that “no one was refused who presented registration papers.” Barrett’s view of events may, however, have been clouded by personal coercion, the distinct absence of blacks at the polls, and the success of Louisiana’s Fusionist movement. Fusionists had focused their efforts on rigging the vote by ensuring that the voter rolls included as many whites as possible and a minimum number of blacks, a trend highlighted in Barrett’s statement that the voting population of the northern side of the Red River in Rapides had “increased considerable” from white emigration. Indeed the Fusionist ticket, which bound Democrats with Liberal Republicans, named those conservatives within the Republican Party who had broken with the Congressional Radicals in 1872. In tandem with the campaign of violence against black voters, the Fusionists stripped the Republicans of the Red River vote and reduced it to a minority party in the region.¹²⁰ Returning boards that challenged the white alliance soon attracted considerable amounts of unwelcome attention. The pro-white *Shreveport Times* addressed the returning board in a November 1874 article titled “The True Policy.” The article detailed the steps taken by Republicans to suppress “the people of their constitutional right to choose their own rulers at the ballot-box” and stated that it was well known that the returning board was “designed to be an instrument of fraud” with the goal of depriving the people—namely white Democrats—of their vote. The article’s authors vowed to deal with the nefarious actions of the returning board in the same manner as all political issues in the region: with violent action both “promptly and vigorously.”¹²¹ The distorted power structure that led white Louisianans to target any individual or institution that stood in the way of white home rule is neatly encapsulated in what was locally known as the Texada incident. A week before the 1868 election, Joseph Texada, an ex-Confederate soldier and the owner of China Grove plantation, shot a freedman six times. A warrant was issued for Texada’s arrest but the sheriff reported that he could not find Texada at his residence or surrounding environs. Witnesses were

¹¹⁹ Elsie Breda to Earnest Breda, April 11, 1873, J. P. Breda Family Papers, Mss. 953, 966, 1021, LLMVC. It is unclear if Breda was a hardcore Republican or if he was just supporting the candidacy of Pinchback for governor. For examples of violence aimed at white Republicans in the region see *Use of the Army*.

¹²⁰ E. J. Barrett testimony, January 30, 1873, Lewis Texada and Family Papers, Mss. 2985, LLMVC. On the returning board law and Fusion ticket see Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 160, 175; Charles Lane, *The Day Freedom Died: The Colfax Massacre, The Supreme Court, and the Betrayal of Reconstruction* (NY: Henry Holt, 2008), 41, 65. The electors were not counted for the state of Louisiana in the 1872 election.

¹²¹ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 375.

notified following an issued warrant but they never came forward. A few days after the shooting, Joseph Texada strode into the sheriff's office in Alexandria and delivered himself. However, upon immediate examination by the justice of the peace of Rapides Parish, Texada was promptly released. The lack of witnesses precluded any action.¹²² Any freedmen who might have witnessed the shooting were terrified and did not come forward to press charges. By contrast, local whites did not condemn Texada's behavior but regarded it as the appropriate way to contain, control, and quell freedmen's access to politics. The actions of Texada and other whites like him—often from established landowning families—re-cloaked and refashioned long standing racial hierarchies which enabled Red River whites to exert continued mastery and dominion over freedpeople.

The commitment to white supremacy was strengthened by the shared belief that whites were protecting themselves in the face of unreasonable and unfair punishment from the North.¹²³ From the standpoint of these former slaveholders, violence was a pragmatic and practical reaction to Reconstruction policies. By contrast, whites in northwest Louisiana remained unreconstructed. Their fealty to the antebellum ideals and to the bygone Confederacy was largely undiminished, which led D. Jewett, the U.S. commissioner for Louisiana to describe the region as “with few exceptions” comprised of “rebels and traitors at heart.” The events of the late 1860s and 1870s had proven that “democracy in the South, in the mouths of Southern men, means treason and rebellion” and Jewett—resigned to bear witness to crimes he was unable to punish or prevent—understood that until “the heavy hand of the nation” was brought to bear on the Red River there would be no cessation of violence. Red River whites were engaged in “as near rebellion” as feasible without military reprisal with the goal of “as in 1861, the unrewarded labor of the black.”¹²⁴ However, the heavy hand of the nation would not come to bear on Red River region and as events escalated it became clear that although the brazen, public nature, and extent of regional violence surprised the nation, continued offenses against the freedpeople of northwest Louisiana were ultimately overlooked, if not condoned. No substantive action was taken to alter the bloody trajectory of the region. The headline grabbing incidents of violence along the Red River would command the attention of Washington and the nation, influence legislation and future legal decisions, but ultimately the national government did little to renounce the actions of white supremacists along the Red. The manner in which the reunited nation dealt with the vehemence, bloodshed, and fine-tuned hatred in northwest Louisiana had far-reaching consequences and longstanding implications for African Americans.

Beginning in 1868, a series of attacks on freedpeople in northwest Louisiana attracted notoriety within Louisiana and, for two of these incidents, the Colfax Massacre and the

¹²² *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 343–344. See also Gilles Vandal, “The Policy of Violence in Caddo Parish, 1865–1884,” *LH* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 159–182.

¹²³ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 369. The violence in this region was not driven by the often-mentioned code of honor.

¹²⁴ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 382.

Coushatta Massacre, attention beyond state borders. These events gathered more attention and consideration than many of the ceaseless, daily occurrences of threats and violence. In part, this was because of the manner in which the violence unfolded, the quickness and assertive dominance of the vigilantes, and the extent of the casualties. The behavior of the paramilitaries and their ease and comfort with racialized violence showcased to the nation the distinctive tenor of race relations along the Red River and the capacity of paramilitarism to enforce white supremacy. Above all, the Easter Sunday 1873 Colfax Massacre starkly demonstrated that white southerners condoned racial violence, not only because Red River whites took part in the slaughter of blacks, but also because all of the Colfax defendants charged with massacring freedmen were released and pardoned after the 1874 trial.¹²⁵ Colfax, however, did not occur in isolation. As black and white Louisianans understood, the paramilitary mission of terrifying, threatening, and killing freedpeople, crippling the Republican Party's electoral reach, and reasserting white mastery, had proven victorious and effective. Each violent episode—whether large or small, one victim or many—was part of an ongoing effort by whites to reassert racial power throughout the region.

The torrent of violence that engulfed northwest Louisiana began with the bloodletting at Shady Grove, a plantation in Bossier Parish. The Bossier Massacre, as it was also referred to, began on September 27, 1868 when a white man from Arkansas stopped in front of the freedmen's homes on Shady Grove. The man noticed an older freedman lying down on his property and asked what the man's politics were. When this question received no response, the Arkansan aimed his rifle and shot at the freedman, missing him twice. The Shady Grove freedmen then tackled and chained the Arkansan in their quarters so that they could transport him to the civil authorities. However, before they could bring him to the parish jail, other white citizens of Bossier banded together and freed the man. Escaping Shady Grove, the white man re-crossed the state line, gathered a posse of between 75 and 100 men armed with all manner of firearms, and returned to the plantation the following morning. Upon arrival, they opened fire, indiscriminately shooting any black in sight before continuing the shooting spree up the road at Gum Springs, where seven individuals were killed. During the melee at Gum Springs, some freedpeople who had escaped from Shady Grove returned and commenced making coffins for their murdered friends and family. While the coffins were being built, the vigilantes returned and shot these carpenters. Eighteen black men and three women were killed on Shady Grove that day and numerous others were taken by the vigilantes and brought to Benton, Louisiana.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Emberton, *Beyond Redemption*, 174, 191. Three books dealing with the day-by-day events of the Colfax Massacre are Leanna Keith, *The Colfax Massacre: The Untold Story of Black Power, White Terror and the Death of Reconstruction* (NY: OUP, 2008); Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*; Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War*, (NY: FSG, 2006). The Colfax Massacre will be discussed in depth later in this chapter.

¹²⁶ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 212–213, 291–293, 379, 389, 392. Reports vary as to whether the white man wanted to take corn without paying, if he shouted “you was all damned radicals” before shooting the old man, or if he asked a child to point out Republicans on the plantation. Regardless, all testimonies agree that he shot at the old freedman, was set free by local whites, and returned with an armed posse to seek revenge. See also Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 155–160; Rable, *But There*

Separately, a group of 75 Shreveport citizens, “armed and nearly all mounted,” descended on Shady Grove and the Freedmen’s Bureau agent reported there were “no colored men in the vicinity.” This agent, the leader of the armed Shreveport group, and two other men then proceeded to Benton, where another hundred armed white men were assembled. Once again, there were no freedmen to be seen and none were found for five miles around. By the following morning, an additional two hundred armed, intoxicated white men had descended on Bossier and “talked about killing the colored people that had left the plantations” and those freedpeople that were hiding out or on the run. The white men of Bossier—many of them leading planters and members of the community—had collectively determined to hunt and kill every freedperson found in the surroundings, and for over a week armed whites swept through the parish killing with impunity. Some of the white men from Arkansas returned that week and killed an additional five freedmen; many blacks were shot and thrown in the Red or mutilated and hung from trees. A firm body count was never attempted but the estimated death toll between September 27 and October 7, 1868 was between 100 and 300 hundred freedpeople.¹²⁷

For those freedpeople who fled Bossier plantations, the period following Shady Grove was tense and tenuous. Henry Boswell came across four dead bodies in the woods when he walked to church. Each victim was bound at hands and feet and their throats cut from ear to ear. Freedmen George Nicholson, Charles Wormley, and Elijah hid for three weeks in holes they dug in the ground. Other refugees recalled that laborers were gathered up on plantations, made to stand in rows, and their names called off from a death list. Once a satisfactory number of names were called, they were marched to Gum Springs and shot. Henry Ellison, a sixty-five-year-old Bossier refugee, recalled two black men burying a family of six in a bagging sack after their bodies had floated down the Red. Henry Ellison likewise hid out near Mooringsport, in Caddo, and came across two freedmen dead in the road, beheaded. There were no prosecutions of any sort at any time for any of the killings that took place during the Shady Grove massacre, despite the actions of the vigilantes being known to the U.S. troops stationed in north Louisiana and the Freedmen’s Bureau.¹²⁸

The dismal response to the ongoing violence in Louisiana and throughout the South was addressed by the Grant administration through the adoption of a series of laws known as the Enforcement Acts. The first set of these acts was comprised of three separate acts passed in 1870 and 1871. It dealt with elections and forbade discrimination by state officials amongst voters on the basis of race while also authorizing the President to appoint election supervisors and further outlined precautions against election bribery and intimidation. The second act

Was No Peace, 75–79. See also *Supplemental Report of Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana on the Conduct of the Late Elections, and the Condition of Peace and Good Order in the State*, LLMVC.

¹²⁷ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 293–294.

¹²⁸ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 205, 213; James Dauphine, “The Knights of the White Camelia and the Election of 1868: Louisiana’s White Terrorists: A Benighting Legacy,” *LH* 30, no. 2: 183. Quite a lot of violence occurred in the Mooringsport and details can be found in *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*.

strengthened enforcement powers in large cities. However, as violence continued to permeate the South, the Ku Klux Klan Act was enacted in April 1871, with the intention of designating certain crimes committed by individuals as offenses punishable under federal law. This meant that attempts to thwart freedpeople's participation in politics could be prosecuted in federal, not partisan state courts.¹²⁹ The KKK Act should have signaled a sea change in the manner in which white violence towards freedpeople was handled because the actions taken against freedpeople were no longer within the purview of local law enforcement. In reality, the acts offered little change in the Red River region, and aside from commissioning an in-depth investigation of southern violence—culminating in *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, the Congressional testimony that documents the constant threat of and realized violence in northwest Louisiana—the Grant administration distanced itself from the policies and issues of Reconstruction. White Leaguers and paramilitaries were frequently pardoned and military aid was painstakingly slow, if present at all, during racially driven conflicts. Nowhere was the poverty of Reconstruction and the piecemeal approach to vigilantism exposed more clearly than in the Colfax Massacre.

William Calhoun established Grant Parish in 1869 on the land that had been the Calhoun family plantations. The Calhouns had owned 700 acres, and operated three large plantations on this land, which curved along seven miles of Red River frontage. Calhoun, a Republican and a Unionist during the Civil War, had been among the wealthiest planters in the state. He carved Grant Parish out of Rapides and with electoral borders to promote a narrow black majority. The parish seat was named Colfax, after Vice President Schuyler Colfax, and would become infamous as the capital of unrestrained racial carnage.¹³⁰ The massacre that took place there would be the single bloodiest incident of Reconstruction. Despite Calhoun's Union sympathies, whites in Colfax and across the Red River region held the authority of state and federal government in contempt and, like others who preyed on black and white Republicans, they remained assured in the knowledge that the law could be overcome by violence. That there were no criminal ramifications for the constant violence and corruption further empowered white supremacists to act with impunity.¹³¹

As with other infamous episodes of paramilitary violence—such as the assault on New Orleans' Liberty Place on September 14, 1874—political factors played a significant role in the genesis of the Colfax massacre. In 1868, white Republican Henry Clay Warmoth and Oscar

¹²⁹ Foner, *Reconstruction*, 454–459, 528. During the political crisis of 1875 another Enforcement Act was proposed alongside the Civil Rights Bill. The new act would have expanded the President's power to put down conspiracies (553–555). See also Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 75; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 172–180; Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 102–125.

¹³⁰ Joel Sipress, "From the Barrel of a Gun: The Politics of Murder in Grant Parish," *LH* 42, no. 3 (Summer 2001): 305–306. On founding of parish see also Mabel Fletcher Harrison and Lavinia McGuire McNeely, *Grant Parish, Louisiana: A History. Published to Celebrate Grant Parish Centennial and Louisiana Pecan Festival 1969* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1969); Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*; Ron Wikberg, E.J. Carter, and Floyd Webb, "Tragedy at Colfax," *The Angolite: The Prison Magazine* 14 (November/December 1989): 39–40; Lemann, *Redemption*. The *Angolite* article was the first investigation into the massacre and was undertaken by inmates at Angola Prison. On parish establishment see *Louisiana Democrat*, April 14, 1869, 2.

¹³¹ Hyde, *Pistols and Politics*, 140 discusses the similar feeling of "unqualified contempt for authority figures" in Louisiana's Florida parishes.

Dunn, a black man, were elected as governor and lieutenant governor respectively. Though blacks represented 50 percent of the House and 20 percent of the Senate, the Louisiana state legislature was one of the most corrupt and violent of state administrations. Calhoun, the only planter from among the largest slaveholding districts known to support and champion the Republicans, was elected to the Louisiana senate through a combination of his economic clout and the support of the freedmen who labored on his land. Calhoun's two Republican allies were scalawags and carpetbaggers respectively: William Phillips, an Alabamian ex-Confederate, and Delos White, a New Yorker who served in the Union Army and later was an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau and one-term sheriff of Grant Parish. Along with Calhoun, these two men were consistently threatened because of their political leanings and personal lives. On September 25, 1871, White and Phillips awoke in the middle of the night to find the house they shared on fire. When the men opened the front door, White was shot and killed instantly and Phillips feigned death amidst the burning cinders from a falling roof. The vigilantes who had ignited the fire affixed one of Phillips's 1868 campaign speeches to a burning stake before riding off. Phillips escaped to New Orleans where he obtained warrants for the arrests of the parish sheriff, deputy sheriff, and four other men. Sheriff Alfred Shelby and Deputy Sheriff Christopher Columbus Nash were subsequently arrested, brought to New Orleans, and later released. When the 1872 state elections rolled around, William Pitt Kellogg was the Republican nominee against a fused ticket of Liberals and Democrat-Reformers—known as the Fusionists—who campaigned with candidate John McEnery. Warmoth, against whom impeachment proceedings had been brought by the state legislature following the 1872 presidential election, supported McEnery.¹³² The election was “so shot through with fraud” that it has never been precisely certain who actually won. In fact, the election was extraordinarily dishonest, primarily because Warmoth wielded tremendous power over local registrars that provided Fusionists with overwhelming opportunities to manipulate votes at the parish level. Additionally, Warmoth headed the statewide returning board which itself was bitterly divided. When the returning board met to certify the ballot, the board split in two and each side declared itself the legal returning board and the other fraudulent. Both sides declared themselves victorious and swore in their chosen officials. The situation of rival governments also meant that two separate sets of appointed local officials jockeyed for position and the validity of these officeholders would become a flashpoint in an already tense Colfax.¹³³ William Ward, a

¹³² Wikberg, Carter, Webb, “Tragedy at Colfax,” 39; Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 54–57, 66–71. Calhoun and Phillips were in long-term relationships with black women and both acknowledged the children of those unions. On White's killing see W. B. Phillips, “Editor Republican,” *New Orleans Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, October 5, 1871, 1; W. B. Phillips, “Speech,” *New Orleans Semi-Weekly Louisianian*, October 8, 1871, 1. The deputy sheriff in 1871 was Christopher Columbus Nash, who would be a central figure in the Colfax Massacre. Warmoth had supported the election of Horace Greely. During Warmoth's suspension, Pickney Benton Stewart Pinchback, son of a Georgia slaveholder and a slave, served as interim governor, further agitating pro-whites. For additional information on the political machinations see Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*; Hogue, *Uncivil War*; Wikberg, Carter, Webb, “Tragedy at Colfax.” See also, Sipress, “From the Barrel of a Gun.”

¹³³ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 91–96; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 241. See Hogue for details of the events and government machinations.

freedman who headed the Colfax black militia and who maintained a close relationship with Calhoun, sought Kellogg's support for the installation of a white sheriff, Daniel Shaw, and a black judge, R. C. Registrar. Fusionists promoted James Hadnot, a man especially opposed to black emancipation, as their representative alongside former Deputy Nash as sheriff and Alphonse Cazabat as judge. For six weeks, these bifurcated representatives tensely skirted around the issue of political validity, but the McErney appointees had the support of Grant Parish whites. However, the tiny, primarily black town of Colfax backed the Kellogg representatives and began to form and train a militia, adding to the escalation of tensions.¹³⁴ To add still more fuel to the fire, the disappointing 1872 cotton crop struck everyone in the region hard. The poor crop returns were themselves the result of a maelstrom of disasters: a cold wet winter, a drought, a hurricane, and intense heat. This economic and environmental element added yet another layer to the charged atmosphere that engulfed the Colfax area.

Whites under Hadnot's leadership had made a show of strength within Colfax on April 1, but the violence began on April 5, 1873 when freedman Jesse McKinney was shot in the head by a group of white men. These individuals were part of the growing numbers of vigilantes who heeded Nash's call and were gathering from a hundred miles around to descend on Colfax. McKinney died eight hours later and then his wife departed for Mirabeau plantation, on Calhoun's land, on the outskirts of Colfax, to seek safety and a coffin. She was one of the numerous freedpeople who would flee to Colfax from the surrounding countryside in the coming days; there, freedpeople established camps within the town boundaries, seeking strength in numbers, and the protection of William Ward's militia. With black troops and white-armed vigilante units converging on Colfax, tension built. Both sides skirmished—with no fatalities—in the aftermath of McKinney's death. William Ward wrote letters to Kellogg outlining the worsening situation and asking for assistance. Calhoun attempted to bring Ward's letters to New Orleans by boat but was seized near Alexandria and returned by force to Colfax, after the letters were taken by the white supremacists. Whites numbering at least 250 reached the line of pecan trees that formed a perimeter around Colfax; several hundred blacks—men, women, and children—were on the other side of the trees, within the limits of the small town.

On Easter Sunday, April 13, 1873, at noon, Nash led a charge of armed whites who crossed the river and rode up the main road into Colfax, where they assembled in military formation in front of the courthouse. During the previous days, African Americans had built earthen works that now surrounded the courthouse grounds. Bearing a white flag, Nash rode out to the freedmen's earthen works and engaged in a brief meeting with Levin Allen, who had replaced Ward as commander. Nash demanded that the freedpeople surrender, give up the courthouse, and put down their weapons. Allen refused. Nash gave Allen and the freedmen

¹³⁴ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, chapter 6; Wikberg, Carter, Webb, "Tragedy at Colfax," 41–43. On the Fusionist selection of Hadnot see *Louisiana Democrat*, October 2, 1872, 2; *Louisiana Democrat*, January 15, 1873, 2.

thirty minutes to allow freedwomen and children to move away from the courthouse and seek safety. Then firing commenced; it is unclear which side fired the first shot. The fighting was hot and remained persistent for hours with both sides remaining firm. The freedmen sustained many casualties while there were no white deaths. Heavy fire from the paramilitaries took their toll as the afternoon progressed and rendered the freedmen's breastworks untenable and forced them from those defenses. Some blacks attempted to make it across the road to the river but in the ensuing melee most of them were shot down. Others were more fortunate—for the time being—and hid in the woods. However, the largest contingent—approximately 65 men—retreated to the courthouse, where the freedmen had prepared siege materials and where they believed a strong position could be held. Meanwhile, the white men cherry picked a black prisoner named Pinckney Chambers to walk, unarmed, under fire to the courthouse. Pinckney was sent with a long fishing pole tied with oil-doused rags lit ablaze. With the supremacists' guns fixed on his back, Pinckney walked to the courthouse, lifted up the pole, and set the shingles alight.

The freedmen inside the building tried to knock the burning shingles off the roof but to no avail while the paramilitaries continued to fire from a distance. Inside, freedmen were burning alive. Blacks and whites recollected the next moments differently. In the white version, the burning freedmen waved a makeshift white flag and lured James Hadnot and the men he led to the courthouse door where they were promptly shot. An article written many years later with the purpose of refuting misstatements maintained that the freedmen had kept up a "regular fusillade on the burning spot" and when they indicated a desire to surrender "the negroes committed one of the most dastardly acts of treachery ever perpetrated by fiends in human shape." In this account, Hadnot, "desirous of allowing the negroes to escape," rushed to the door with five or six other men in order to decide terms of surrender and was fired on from inside the building. It was this shooting by the freedmen as the whites prepared to accept surrender that resulted in the slaughter that followed the surrender. In the black version, the men still alive in the courthouse were stacking their firearms and Hadnot was shot by an over excited member of his own posse. All versions of events agree that after Hadnot's shooting, whites shot the freedmen "down like dogs, and those that escaped the first fire were ridden down in the open field . . . and shot without mercy."¹³⁵ Some blacks were killed in close combat. Between 28 and 48 freedmen were rounded up as prisoners and held under a pecan tree while "enraged" and insatiable whites decided their fate. Later in the evening, after the vigilantes had dined and partaken of celebratory liquor, they decided to execute the wounded and prisoners. One man stated that he had ridden 400 miles "to kill niggers" and was not ready to stop. First, they shot the wounded. Then, the remaining prisoners were prepared to march. Luke Hadnot, son of the dead Hadnot, called out five names, lined the men up in close proximity, and killed all five

¹³⁵ "Facts of the Colfax Riot: Written by the Late Editor of the Chronicle to Refute Misstatements." *The Colfax Chronicle*, April 9, 1921, Ella V. Aldrich Schwing Papers, Mss. 3374, LLMVC.

using only two bullets. Others followed suit and selected specific victims to execute; some feigned ambivalence about killing their prisoners before firing. Recalling the commodified, propertied language of the antebellum era, many whites referred to their prisoners as ‘beeves’ or cattle and they belittled the cries of nearby freedwomen who witnessed the killings. One of the whites noticed that some of the wounded prisoners were alive and the posse began a clean up operation. In this manner, most of the prisoners were executed.¹³⁶

The steamboat *Southwestern* was a mile upriver from Colfax and heeded the requests of the white men to land and evacuate the injured Hadnot and two other wounded whites. The vigilantes declared, “if we wanted to see dead niggers here was a chance” and proudly showed the captain and most of the steamboat passengers around the battlefield. The captain provided the first eyewitness account.¹³⁷ Daybreak displayed the extent of the carnage and the distribution of the bodies told a harrowing story. The shallow breastworks around the courthouse were filled with the early victims. A substantial number of bodies fanned out from the courthouse and piled up on either side of the door. Other corpses were found in the warehouses and buildings in town. The courthouse continued to smolder and held the charred remains of still more freedmen. In between terrorizing the remaining blacks who attempted to count, locate, and bury the dead, whites carried out a perfunctory body count. The exact number of dead is unknown but the accepted victim count ranges from 70 to 165.¹³⁸

John Williams wrote his recollections of Colfax in the early twentieth century but his sentiments echoed those of Colfax area whites in the immediate aftermath of the massacre. Williams stated that the early days of Grant Parish before whites reclaimed the town from the grips of freedpeople and Republican rule were somewhat dark and “daylight never did break until the great day of Colfax known as the Colfax Riot.”¹³⁹ For whites at the time and for generations thereafter, the events of April 13 marked a return to dominance and reassertion of white ideals and white power. Not every Red River white celebrated the violence. Henry Hyams Sr., for instance, had purchased and sent his son a pistol and ammunition on April 4, 1873. In the aftermath of the massacre, the elder Hyams wrote nervously inquiring about Henry Jr’s safety in light of “this unfortunate business,” and declared that “testimony clearly” indicated that the conflict had begun because of the “lawless violence and reign of terror” brought about

¹³⁶ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, chapter 7; Lemann, *Redemption*, 12–29; Wikberg, Carter, Webb, “Tragedy at Colfax,” 43–45. See also Richard Rubin, “The Colfax Riot,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2003): 155–158. Hadnot did not die immediately from his wounds but expired much later that evening after being put on a steamboat to Alexandria for better medical attention. Much more detailed accounts of the intricacies of the massacre can be found in the texts cited, especially in Keith. See also: *Louisiana Democrat*, April 9, 1873, 1; “Facts About Colfax: Statement of Judge W. R. Rutland,” *The Ouchita Telegraph*, May 31, 1873, 1; “Statement of a Citizen,” *The Ouchita Telegraph*, April 26, 1873, 4. On Hadnot’s death see *Louisiana Democrat*, April 15, 1873, 1. For additional details of the arson portion of the massacre see O. W. Watson, “An Incident of My Boyhood Days”, Colfax Riot Collection, Colfax Public Library, Colfax, LA.

¹³⁷ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 107.

¹³⁸ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 109; O. W. Watson, “An Incident of My Boyhood Days”, Colfax Riot Collection; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 437. Numerous lists of the dead can be found in *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 168, 307, 338, 436–438.

¹³⁹ “A History of Colfax Written by Mr. Williams between 1926–1931,” John A. Williams History of Colfax, La., Mss. 4293, LLMVC.

by the actions of African Americans in the region. He was confident that “judicial investigation” would “fully and fairly elicit the truth,” and was relieved that “what was contemplated for other localities” had been stopped. Writing just over a fortnight after the massacre, Hyams turned his attention to the control of their plantation laborers; he hoped “your people” were untouched and unaffected by the catastrophe and were “honestly and quietly at their work.”¹⁴⁰ While Hyams preferred to dwell on the freedpeople’s quiet loyalty, Charles Boothby, a former U.S. Army captain who was now the superintendent of education for New Orleans, wrote his family in Maine about “political troubles in the country.” A Republican, writing about the racialized state of politics in his adopted state, he acknowledged that a guiding purpose of the violence was to “intimidate the colored men” so they would not register and vote. Northern reporting of the massacre echoed Boothby’s concern about voting turnout and participation while also condemning the magnitude of the slaughter, calling it butchery and drawing parallels with the Fort Pillow Massacre.¹⁴¹ However, while northern papers took umbrage with and questioned the widespread scale of the violence and the manner in which freedpeople were killed, reports often noted the supposedly violent propensities of the state to explain white actions. In fact, most articles in the aftermath of Colfax were disappointed that whites, allegedly the more intelligent and religious race, had behaved so violently. However, Boothby did not sympathize or side with the freedmen, noting “in all the ‘reprisings’ of the negroes, that no one is killed but the negro.” He felt that the freedpeople’s actions cultivated a feeling of bitterness towards the Republicans and that African Americans used “the claim that they are deprived” of their elected officers as “their excuse for all their rebellion.” This was not a unique situation to Louisiana and Boothby heaped blame for the violence and murder throughout the South on freedpeople. His letter assured his family that the “old rebel element” was taking control of this growing problem and had plans to “obtain control of the state governments.”¹⁴²

For many local whites, Nash and his fellow vigilantes were heroes who had saved the region from a terrible fate and had protected women and children while upholding white supremacy. Dosia Williams Moore remembered that her father and Captain Louis Texada headed the home guard that protected “the white women during Colfax.” She also proudly made

¹⁴⁰ Henry Hyams to “My Dear Son,” April 4, 1873; April 26, 1873, Henry M. Hyams Family Papers, Mss. 1392, 1564, LLMVC. There was a widespread belief held by Louisiana whites that the freedpeople who had “incited” Colfax had planned similar events at other locations throughout the state. See also Wells, ed., *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River*, 72.

¹⁴¹ The Fort Pillow Massacre happened on April 12, 1864. The Union garrison at Fort Pillow, Tennessee had surrendered but more than 300 African American soldiers were killed by Confederates who refused to view and treat these African American soldiers as traditional prisoners of war.

¹⁴² Charles Boothby to “Dear Mother,” April 18, 1873; Charles Boothby to “Dear Brother George,” September 25, 1874, Charles W. Boothby Papers, Mss. 4847, LLMVC. For contemporary coverage, particularly Northern, of Colfax see: “The Colfax Massacre,” *Evening Post*, April 18, 1873, 4; “The Colfax Massacre,” *Albany Evening Journal*, April 18, 1873, 3; “The Colfax Massacre,” *Evening Post*, April 19, 1873, 2; “The Colfax Massacre,” *Massachusetts Spy*, June 2, 1873, 1; “The Louisiana Massacre,” *New York Commercial Advertiser*, April 18, 1873, 4; “The War of Races in Louisiana,” *New York Herald*, April 18, 1873, 6; “Re-Enactment of the Fort Pillow Massacre,” *Indianapolis Sentinel*, April 19, 1873, 1; “The Colfax Massacre,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 19, 1873, 1; “Further Details of the Colfax Massacre,” *Portland Daily Press*, April 17, 1873, 3. Reporting on the massacre trickled out after a few weeks and many papers would just post the telegrams from James Beckwith, the U.S. Attorney who brought a federal indictment against the Colfax vigilantes in *United States v. Columbus Nash et al.*

“blue whistlers” ammunition for her neighbors to use in the massacre. A glowing newspaper article in the aptly named *Caucasian*, a Shreveport based publication, described Nash in superhero terms when describing how he had rescued white women from the clutches of political, non-submissive, freedmen.¹⁴³ Apart from the *Caucasian*’s partisan hyperbole, there was no shortage of hero worship for Nash from regional whites. His Confederate service in the Sabine Rifles and his imprisonment as a prisoner of war elevated his status and leadership quality. A fawning tribute to Nash praised his ability to pull together a force of whites to defend Colfax after the freedmen “took possession . . . and drove the white people out.” Nash epitomized the visible, brazen, and proud composition of Red River white supremacy. His commitment to the Confederate ideals and his stalwart assault on the courthouse ensured that he evaded arrest for his Colfax involvement. That alone further elevated his hero status. Nash and the hundreds of men who joined him at Colfax and who partook in the many daily acts of violence throughout the region provided a canvas upon which whites could project their desires and fears. Instead of portraying white violence as crude vigilantism, local whites recast the Colfax Massacre as one of racial justice. The provocations, according to regional paramilitaries, were many: rampaging blacks, stealing, threatening, and looting of plantations by freedpeople, sexual violations and overtures by aggressive black men. This backdrop allowed for the preferred version of events and a gendered re-reading of Colfax that glorified the valiant white paramilitaries because they not only saved the political future of the parish, but they also preserved the sanctity of white womanhood. Kate Grant was a lifelong resident of Grant Parish and her family, as well as her husband’s, were prominent landowners. After the massacre she wrote a highly romantic version of the event replete with a love triangle between a white woman and two men, one of whom enthusiastically participates in the massacre. The front piece of “From Blue to Gray, or The Battle of Colfax” notes it is a woman’s tribute “of admiration to the heroes of Grant” and to all the men who fought “so valiantly” alongside Nash. Grant, and her contemporaries, viewed these vigilantes as valiant warriors and supported the reign of terror that encompassed the Red River. Kate Grant declared that she had been painstaking in her commitment to “adhere solely to the truth” and the manuscript is endorsed by all of the leading men of Grant Parish, including Nash, the editor of the *Colfax Chronicle*, a district court clerk, and the parish superintendent of education. The ability of Nash and other vigilantes to operate beyond the limits of the law created a mythical and romanticized image of white supremacy that long endured in the way Red River whites remembered “the War of Reconstruction in Grant Parish.”¹⁴⁴

Colfax was the apex of years of continued tension and constant violence. It sparked an onslaught of political takeovers throughout the state. Following the massacre, Fusionist leaders

¹⁴³ Wells, ed., *Civil War, Reconstruction and Redemption on Red River*, 69–72; “Sheriff Nash,” *The Caucasian*, May 16, 1874, 1.

¹⁴⁴ Milton Dunn, *Christopher Columbus Nash: A Tribute*, 3–7, LLMVC; “From Blue to Gray, or The Battle of Colfax,” Layssard Family Papers, Mss. 2875, LLMVC. In the novel, the vigilante gets the girl.

bypassed any pretense of legality and pushed Republicans out of office any way possible. It also enticed ten thousand white men statewide to formally join paramilitary companies such as the White Leagues.¹⁴⁵ News of the massacre traveled quickly but it would be some time before a handful of Colfax perpetrators would stand in court. The militia group sent by Governor Kellogg did not arrive in Colfax until April 15, while a U.S. Military unit of 98 men departed New Orleans on April 19. Although the U.S. Company had mobilized by April 17, white supremacist forces within New Orleans had warned boat captains about the repercussions of bringing troops to Colfax. The U.S. commanding officer discovered that no one was willing to transport the company and that captains feared violent harm to themselves and or their vessels if they participated in a relief mission. Thus, it took two days before a boat agreed to take the troops to Colfax at an exorbitant price.¹⁴⁶ When they arrived, the blue-clad troops of the 19th Infantry were given a frosty reception and the inflamed public opinion in the region did not lessen the feeling of insecurity that overtook the U.S. troops. Regional whites were infuriated when a grand jury was appointed in the Colfax case in late April; Ernest Breda, whose wife had implored him to give up his radical leanings, agreed to serve as prosecutor and pursued indictments against white participants. The Colfax Riot, as it was called by white Louisianans keen to imply black chaos and the restoration of white order, also caused an economic and social upheaval in the region. Cotton crops were under cultivated since many black laborers had been murdered and the survivors were loath to return to hostile plantations. With the grand jury in motion, moreover, many white participants absented themselves from their holdings and established camps in the vicinity. However, this did not mean that violence in the state or in the Red River region abated. It remained a steady hum, prompting President Grant to declare portions of Louisiana in a state of insurrection on May 22 and the Colfax case moved from a local grand jury case to a federal investigation. The Civil War era monitor *Ozark*, which had survived the Red River campaign and remained the only vessel able to withstand the tempestuous nature of the Red, was used to transport the indicted to New Orleans for *United States v. Columbus Nash et al.* However, although 97 names were included on the federal indictment, only seven individuals were successfully arrested and transported to New Orleans. On December 4, 1873, those seven suspects were remanded into federal custody, with two additional suspects located and arrested in the new year. However, the nine in custody were mainly minor players and the headline defendants remained at large. Nash, whose name stood in the case heading and signified all the Colfax vigilantes, notably eluded arrest and escaped to Texas.

When the matter went to trial, U.S. attorney James Beckwith presented an indictment that included 32 criminal counts. His charges addressed fundamental questions: what and whom

¹⁴⁵ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 112, 116; Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*, 217.

¹⁴⁶ Keith, *Colfax Massacre*, 113.

did the Constitution protect and what privileges and immunities were guaranteed and which branches of the government carried the responsibility to protect them. Beckwith argued that it was the obligation of the federal government to act as a natural guardian of constitutional rights. In essence, the trial vetted the constitutionality of the Enforcement Acts and provided an opportunity to rebalance the power between the federal government and the still rebellious southern states. Catastrophically, Beckwith did not stress the racial motivation behind the massacre in the presentation of evidence because he had not been able to establish an organized white supremacist link between McKinney's murder on April 6 and the massacre on April 13, 1873. This would be detrimental during the second trial, presided over by Supreme Court Justice Stephen Bradley, after the first trial proceedings ended in March 1874 in mistrial. The new trial was labeled *U.S. v. Cruikshank et al* and it would make its way to the Supreme Court.¹⁴⁷

In the second trial the defense team in *Cruikshank* made a dual request: that the presiding judge dismiss all the charges on the grounds that the Enforcement Acts had been rendered void by the *Slaughterhouse* ruling and that Justice Bradley attend the trial. The *Slaughterhouse* case, on which Bradley had offered a dissenting opinion, was a Fourteenth Amendment ruling that afforded federal action and protection a very narrow scope, particularly on civil rights, which remained overwhelmingly a state matter. In an ironic twist of fate, that *Slaughterhouse* decision was handed down the day after the Colfax Massacre. *Cruikshank* went to trial on June 7, with Justice Bradley present, and the jury delivered a not guilty verdict on June 10. Three of the defendants—William Cruikshank, J. P. Hadnot, and Bill Irwin—were convicted of conspiracy. This conviction would be the reason the case would enter the Supreme Court, since Bradley overturned these convictions, voided Beckwith's indictment, and also declared key sections of the Enforcement Acts unconstitutional in his June 24 opinion from the circuit bench. Bradley's circuit court ruling suspended federal law enforcement throughout Louisiana and the South, and allowed white men to use violence against blacks—armed or not—with no interference from federal legal or law enforcement. At its core, the decision declared that the massacre had not been racially motivated and thus “the power of congress . . . does not extend to the passage of laws for the suppression of ordinary crime within the states.” Beckwith had been unable to irrefutably prove that the arc of events leading to the slaughter on April 13 had been racially driven. Largely, this was a result of limited funds to investigate and provide security for witnesses, but, more significantly, because most of the 140 witnesses for the prosecution were freedpeople. For the jurors, the testimony of these freedpeople did not carry the same gravitas as that of a white witness. However, by failing to baldly portray the political drivers of Colfax as a longstanding matter of race, Beckwith handed white

¹⁴⁷ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 107–152; Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*, 154–229.

paramilitaries carte blanche to continue killing with impunity.¹⁴⁸ Ultimately, the testimony of the wounded, of survivors, and bereaved family members was deemed less convincing than that of the defense. The deep-set hatred that fueled the racially driven massacre was perceived as wholly apart from politics and race relations, and so the bloody event was ruled as merely an ordinary crime. Red River vigilantism had been validated on a local, state, and federal levels.

The freed defendants were feted the entire journey back to Colfax. Music and cannon fire salutes followed as they moved up the Red onboard the *Ozark*. An enormous outdoor barbeque was held in their honor in Colfax on July 25, 1874. The pro-white, pro-Democrat paper *The Caucasian*, called it the “mass meeting” for organizing “the White Man’s Party for the Fall meeting.”¹⁴⁹ Whites were further emboldened in the aftermath of the ruling. They were quite literally able to act without fear of reprisal and kill with absolution. Many of the men who were active in the Colfax Massacre formed a White League that participated in the August 25, 1874 Coushatta Massacre. In that grisly incident, the League imprisoned and demanded the resignation of six white Republican officeholders, all of who were associated with Marshall Twitchell, the carpetbagger Republican leader of the parish. Twitchell testified that 35 armed men compelled officeholders to resign under threat of death or extreme injury. Over the course of four days, the armed whites hung two black men and publically tortured another to death. Twenty freedmen were arrested. Then, on August 30, the six white officeholders—including Twitchell’s brother and two brothers-in-law—and six black men were arrested and taken to Shreveport. On the way, the group was overtaken by another mob of armed whites and the six officeholders were shot and killed. Three were shot in the woods behind a plantation 28 miles from Coushatta while the remaining three were killed two miles upriver. The bodies were riddled with bullets—one was “so gashed and perforated” that it could not be moved—and were grotesquely abused and mutilated.¹⁵⁰

Unlike other violent episodes, Coushatta caught the attention of many local whites because the six victims were white. Henry Marston, who devoted fifteen words in his diary to Colfax, recorded the news and events of Coushatta in five separate diary accounts over the course of a month. In his estimation, “civil strife” had “commenced in our state.”¹⁵¹ The state newspapers were divided over the incident with the Republican papers placing blame on the meteoric rise in popularity of the White Leagues while the Democratic papers located the cause as the corrupt power structure in New Orleans. In northwest Louisiana, however, the mostly local papers concentrated on convincing readers that outsiders, likely Texans, had committed

¹⁴⁸ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 107–152; Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*, 154–229. The *Ozark* had been used in the Red River Campaign, and was the only remaining vessel from that engagement. It was also the only ship able to traverse the Red.

¹⁴⁹ Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*, 215; Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 148; Colfax Riot Collection.

¹⁵⁰ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 70, 180, 199, 251–252; Jimmy Shoalmire, “Carpetbagger Extraordinary: Marshal Harvey Twitchell, 1840–1905” [PhD diss., Mississippi State University, 1969]: 150–151, LLMVC. See also Rable, *But There Was No Peace*, 133–136.

¹⁵¹ September 2 (quote), 3, 4, 6, 20, 1874 entries, 1874 Plantation Diary, Henry Marston Volumes, Marston (Henry and Family) Papers, Mss. 624, LLMVC.

the massacre.¹⁵² This twist now made vocal white Republicans a particular target and “it had a very bad effect” on the remaining white Republicans in northern Louisiana, a Congressional committee later heard. The violence did not abate in the Red River parishes and White League and Democratic Party membership continued to surge, with many of those who had volunteered for the Civil War also shouldering arms within the White Leagues to fight against Reconstruction.¹⁵³ Days after the Coushatta Massacre, on September 14, the New Orleans street battle of 1874 began. Under the command of General Ogden, organized White League companies, which had grown more popular and more brazen since Colfax, staged a coup d’état that overthrew the Kellogg government. When the sun rose on September 15, the Louisiana State Militia no longer existed and no volunteer black militia company would muster to defend the Reconstruction government in New Orleans, and more broadly, Louisiana. The Colfax Massacre had opened the door to unabated and unrestricted violence. The circuit court ruling that stemmed from the massacre sparked an increase in racial extremism and signaled the northern retreat from involvement in southern political and racial matters.¹⁵⁴ Colfax had proven the effectiveness of vigilantism. For Red River whites, it upheld racial mastery and the racial power structures of white supremacy, but for those once enslaved, Colfax was a brutal episode that narrowed still further their pathways out of slavery.

The extremely personal and systemic violence at Colfax was deeply rooted in antebellum notions of power, mastery, and identity in the Red River region. Indeed, the visceral and violent tenor of the Reconstruction era continued the arc of racialized control that had reigned supreme within the private sphere of the plantation. With the dawn of emancipation, this violent dynamic moved off the plantation and into the public arena and the brutality of enslavement was redressed in visceral and brazen garb. Violence and intimidation was a political and racial constant in the Red River region. It was a brutal, perpetual fact of life in this region that was utilized by former slaveholders to limit freedpeople’s grasp on freedom. Southern surrender had turned northwest Louisiana upside down, but white male citizens continued to employ violence to reset the region to their liking. The Colfax Massacre and subsequent court rulings had secured and enshrined the use of vigilantism to control freedpeople and the ballot box. The Red River had become unbearable and unlivable for blacks. Freedpeople began to leave the region in droves, heeding the call of Henry Adams and other black leaders who felt that leaving the rural South would be the only means to end the “curse” of living with and working for “our former masters and ex-slaveholders.” Like Adams, they could “live no longer in the Southern States.”¹⁵⁵ In the aftermath of the *Cruikshank* and *Slaughterhouse* rulings and the successful subduing of the region’s freedpeople, white former slaveholders such as John

¹⁵² Shoalmire, “Carpetbagger Extraordinary,” 180–181.

¹⁵³ *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 370; Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 126, 131.

¹⁵⁴ Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 131–143; Fitzgerald, *Splendid Failure*, 181, 210.

¹⁵⁵ Painter, *Exodusters*, 84. *Use of the Army in Certain of the Southern States*, 409.

Moncure found that their “reverie” which had “oppressed” and forced “every respectable man ... look upon with humiliation and the gloomiest forebodings for the future” had ended with white power finally restored.¹⁵⁶ For their part, the future would indeed prove singularly gloomy for African Americans. White supremacy reigned triumphant. After the tumultuous years of radical rule, white planter power had been reestablished and validated at the local, state, and national levels. With heads held high, Christopher Columbus Nash and his fellow vigilantes returned to Colfax and took up positions of power and prominence.

¹⁵⁶ John Moncure to “My Dear Wife,” January 6, 1870, J. Fair Hardin Collection, Mss. 1040, LLMVC.

Conclusion

“We Lost All Hopes”: The Legacy of Colfax

The Colfax Massacre case, *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, went all the way to the Supreme Court. At the circuit level, the *Cruikshank* ruling had denied the sovereignty of the United States government over the rights of citizens that have traditionally been associated with the bill of rights and common law. Beyond this, the protection of these rights and privileges were deemed to be within the purview of individual state governments. Not only did this free the Colfax offenders from federal prosecution but it transferred jurisdiction over civil rights violations to state governments. In Louisiana, where white home rule was in the ascendancy, the *Cruikshank* decision had serious repercussions with paramilitary political terrorism reigning practically unchecked. Following this landmark Supreme Court decision, vigilantes could wage war against black civil rights without risk of any legal repercussion as long as white supremacist Democrats, or their allies, retained political control of Louisiana. In the short-term, the ruling gave blanket validation to incidents already committed and the continued violence toward freedpeople. It also denied any future forms of protection and justice to freedpeople. Following *Cruikshank*, there was now no judicial recourse or military safeguard for freedpeople in northwest Louisiana, nor the South more generally. Race-based violence would be an acknowledged, accepted, legally sanctioned part of regional race relations.

When the Colfax perpetrators returned to town amid fireworks and celebration, it signaled the ascension of white supremacy and the solidification of southern politics along a white versus black axis. It would be another twenty years before the Supreme Court sanctioned racial segregation in the case of another Louisiana native, Homer Plessy, but the language and vocabulary of race politics had begun to crystalize. In Colfax and elsewhere across the state, Louisiana whites rallied around the Democratic Party and tightened access to the ballot box for African Americans. The Grant administration drastically pulled back from applying the Enforcement Acts and also diminished its campaign against vigilante violence. At every level of government and for the vast majority of the civilian nation, attention turned away from racialized violence. The political, social, ideological, and emotional welfare of African Americans receded almost entirely from public view. Along the Red River, the court decisions provided the ideal opportunity to push freedpeople—and their dreams of widening the pathway out of slavery—to the periphery. For the Red River region, white supremacy had won the battle and the war.

The Colfax Massacre and the subsequent circuit court decision represented the high water mark of regional white supremacy and perhaps unsurprisingly for a community that

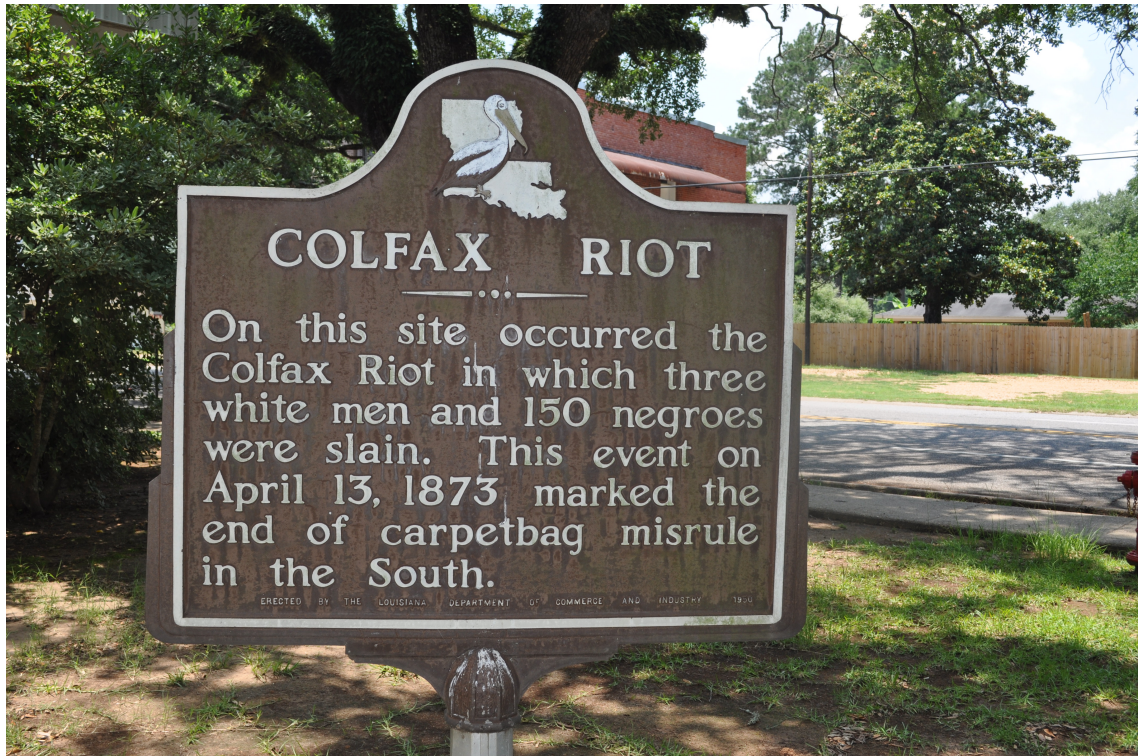
deemed white power a right and black powerlessness a given, the Supreme Court ruling garnered little attention among local whites. Despite this, the ruling validated the race-based violence and dominating mastery that undergirded Red River identity for half a century. Indeed, *Cruikshank* dealt a devastating result to African Americans in political terms. The majority opinion stated that the Fifteenth Amendment did not confer “a positive right of suffrage” on black men but it “merely secured them against discrimination based on color.” The chief justice wrote that the right to vote came from the states themselves and the federal government could not protect “voters of their own creation.”¹ Politically, the decision was far reaching and would impact generations of African Americans. Back in Louisiana, the release of the Colfax defendants, and their acquittal at the local, state, and national level, “reaffirmed home rule” and the power of individual states to overlook core civil liberties at their discretion.² White vigilantes did not tarry. Following the *Cruikshank* decision, paramilitaries and white landowners exerted still more pressure on black participation in the Republican Party and limited, through terror and economic pressure, black-white coalition building within that party.

Black political participation would continue in the cane parishes and within the plantation counties along the Mississippi, but where white majorities could secure political power, African American polling faded, particularly after the end of the military occupation of Louisiana. The Louisiana state government would directly cite the *Cruikshank* ruling in 1879 when Bourbon Democrats attempted to stifle black enfranchisement. The ruling’s statement that “the Constitution of the United States has not conferred the right of suffrage upon anyone” provided the fuel legislators needed to craft the 1879 Louisiana Constitution, which reversed the radical thrust of the 1868 constitution. Just over a decade after African Americans and Creoles of color worked to establish a formal bill of rights, secured full citizenship rights for African American men, and set up racially integrated public schools within New Orleans, white Democrats restricted the rights and liberties of freedmen, relocated the capital to Baton Rouge—where racial authority could be more readily overseen, and authorized five state Supreme Court justices with twenty-year terms to exercise supervisory authority over the lower courts. The new 1879 constitution set the political tenor of Louisiana for the next twenty years. When lawmakers reconvened in 1898 to write a still more restrictive constitution, they reinforced the legal restrictions that had led to the forced political surrender of blacks, and electoral manipulation that characterized the South during the so-called Redemption period.³

¹ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 157. See also Lemann, *Redemption* and Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*. On violence in the Red River region during the 1874 election see Jerry Sanson, “White Man’s Failure: The Rapides Parish 1874 Election,” *LH* 31, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 39–58; Jerry Sanson, “Rapides Parish, Louisiana, During the End of Reconstruction,” *LH* 27, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 167–182; Gilles Vandal, “The Policy of Violence in Caddo Parish, 1865–1884,” *LH* 32, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 159–182.

² Wikberg, Carter, Webb, “Tragedy at Colfax,” 47.

³ Keith, *The Colfax Massacre*, 159; Hogue, *Uncivil War*, 124.



Official designated sign marking the Colfax Massacre on the site of the event. Of note is that the sign refers to the event as the Colfax Riot and only the white death toll is correct. Photo from author's collection.

In the immediate aftermath, the *Cruikshank* ruling played a critical role during the 1876 elections, particularly in the arena of voter intimidation. White Leagues dominated state politics and were extremely adept at closing voting registration to freedmen and intimidating those blacks that managed to make it to the polls on election day. With Louisiana in a state of political anarchy, both the Republicans and Democrats experienced great difficulty in remaining unified during the contested election and the state election ended, once again, with both parties swearing in their candidate as governor on January 8, 1877. In the end, the state and presidential elections were decided by the Compromise of 1877 and this agreement brought to a close both the deadlocked presidential election and the Reconstruction era. In return for the Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida electoral votes, Republicans in the Hayes-Tilden Compromise promised to recognize Democratic control of the southern state legislatures and avoid intervening in local affairs. The compromise elevated Rutherford Hayes to the presidency and definitively terminated the Reconstruction period in the South. White Louisianans, like their compatriots across the former Confederate states, now hailed that the South had been “redeemed.” Republican rule had been overthrown, the revolutionary politics of emancipation arrested, and white supremacy violently reasserted. The return of the Democratic regime would have a profound influence on the lives of blacks for generations.⁴ Hayes’s ascendancy to the presidency meant that former slaveholder and sugar planter Francis Nicholls, the Democratic governor-elect, became the Redeemer governor of Louisiana. Nicholls was sworn into office on April 24, 1877 and, concurrently, Louisiana was demilitarized with federal troops marching out of New Orleans in advance of a statewide withdrawal. For Louisiana blacks, and those in northwest Louisiana in particular, the formal end of Reconstruction and the evacuation of troops from the state meant that freedpeople “lost all hopes.” As Henry Adams bitterly observed, Louisiana, along with the rest of the South, became governed by “the very men that held us slaves.”⁵

Although the Hayes-Tilden Compromise brought Reconstruction to a formal close, the circuit court decision in the Colfax Massacre had served as the curtain call for Reconstruction in the Red River region. In the aftermath of the massacre, racial tensions reached a fever pitch and the unabated violence made it impossible for regional blacks to experience any of freedom’s privileges. As a result, a large number of freedpeople in northern Louisiana became engaged in emigration plans that culminated in the 1880s with the Exoduster movement. In order to be seen as more than laboring bodies, to be afforded and to experience a measure of their freedom, and to escape violence freedpeople throughout the Red River region partook in a collective migration to Kansas. Henry Adams was the backbone of the northwest Louisiana movement and

⁴ C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (NY: Doubleday, 1956); Perman, *The Road to Redemption*, 172–277; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 481–507. See also Follett, “Legacies of Enslavement.”

⁵ Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*, 233, 261–267; Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*; Sterling, ed., *The Trouble They Seen*, 479 (quote).

he formed a committee that gathered information on the treatment of blacks throughout the South. This committee morphed into the Colonization Council after the Colfax Massacre and focused efforts on “ameliorating the conditions” of blacks under a four-pronged plan. One aspect of the plan appealed to the President and Congress to set aside a territory within the United States for the exclusive use of blacks. Adams and his organization played a major role in galvanizing the Exoduster migration of Louisiana freedpeople.⁶

Adams organized a colonization council for African Americans living near Shreveport and in the tri-state region of Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas in 1876. From there, they petitioned President Grant for emigration to a territory “where they could live” and evinced a willingness to be sent to Liberia. Adams and other politicized blacks rode across several northern Louisiana parishes reactivating local Republican clubs and they encountered tremendous white opposition to any and all organization. They encountered freedpeople demoralized by the persecution they faced and the lack of justice in Louisiana. Indeed, “in 1876, the rural people were more eager to leave the South than were Adams and his men.” Traveling across northern Louisiana, Adams delivered his first public speeches advocating emigration in 1877. A petition drawn up by the Colonization Council included the signatures of 98,000 men, women, and children who were eager to go to Liberia or to another territory of the United States. The majority of these individuals lived in Louisiana; a meeting in September 1877 in Shreveport produced a petition with 3,000 names attached to it, although the delegates at this meeting claimed to represent the wishes of 29,000 souls.⁷ Former slaves of the Red River region were pushed to breaking point and they continued to leave throughout the 1880s. Over five thousand African Americans would ultimately leave northern Louisiana for Kansas.⁸

As Red River blacks left the region and those who remained were shoved to the margins of society, the individuals who partook in the Colfax Massacre and numerous other vigilante acts continued to hold places of power and visibility. Christopher Columbus Nash’s rise to prominence within Colfax town governance was particularly noteworthy. Nash, who evaded arrest for his involvement in the massacre, first served as sheriff before being appointed in 1877 as Grant Parish tax collector by Governor Nicholls. Nash’s political future continued to brighten, as did his economic prospects. He married the daughter of a prominent Natchitoches planter and subsequently set up a successful commercial firm. In June 1888, Nash was chosen as president of the Grant Parish police jury and also as mayor of Colfax. Nash was not the only beneficiary of the Massacre. Governor Nicholls appointed Johnnie Hadnot—son of James

⁶ Joe Caldwell, “Any Place But Here: Kansas Fever in Northeast Louisiana,” *NLHJ* 21, issue 2/3 (Spring/Summer 1990): 52–53; Morgan Peoples, ““Kansas Fever” in North Louisiana,” *LH* 11, no. 2 (Spring 1970): 129–130.

⁷ Painter, *Exodusters*, 84–85. See also Follett, “Legacies of Enslavement”; Michelle Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny After Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2004); Rebecca Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2008). On the Back to Africa movement to relocation to Liberia see Kenneth Barnes, *Journey of Hope: The Back-To-Africa Movement in Arkansas in the Late 1800s* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 2004).

⁸ Peoples, ““Kansas Fever” in North Louisiana”: 122. For discussion of the struggles Exodusters faced on the journey and in relocation see Painter, *Exodusters*, 202–212, 225–265; Painter, “Millenarian Aspects of the Exodus to Kansas of 1879,” *JSHS* 9 (Spring 1976): 331–338.

Hadnot, one of the white casualties of the massacre—to the police jury. For townspeople like Hadnot, the events of April 13, 1873 remained at the forefront of their memories and served as a reminder of “the shackles they that day struck off.”⁹

Colfax served as an enduring reminder of the power of white supremacy and the ability of white power to manipulate the course of political, economic, and social events. It also demonstrated both viscerally and violently that Hadnot, Nash, and countless others would constrain the freedom of regional African Americans in multiple ways. As historian Stephen Kantrowitz observes, Southerners were adept at using “legacies of the past,” including racial slavery and post-war atrocities such as Colfax to reinforce the message that white men monopolized political and military power.¹⁰ Those key messages were reflected in the manner that northwest Louisiana still remembers the Colfax Massacre. The very ground where the massacre took place, the massacre is known, referred to, and remembered to this day as a riot by regional whites. On April 13, 1921—the forty-eighth anniversary of the massacre—the white townspeople of Colfax unveiled a monument in Colfax cemetery “to the memory of the white victims of the memorable riot of 1873.” The local newspaper stated that forty veterans attended the event and that the ceremony was conducted by Mary Hadnot, the daughter of James Hadnot, and Sidney Harris’s wife. Mrs. Harris also interred her husband’s ashes underneath the monument she was dedicating to “his memory and to the memory of those who fell by his side.” The ceremony included the monument’s unveiling and addresses from the two women as well as local dignitaries and concluded with a procession that marched to the pecan tree in front of the Cameron House that is locally known as the “Riot Tree.” There a dedication service marked the tree as a “monument commemorative of the battle of ’73.”¹¹ The monument unveiled that day is one of two markers to the Colfax Massacre in the tiny town. The state marker, which is placed in the front of the modern courthouse, effectively marks the battleground for it stands on the same site as the original courthouse did during the massacre, reads as follows:

Colfax Riot

On this site occurred the Colfax Riot in which three white men and 150 negroes were slain. This event on April 13, 1873 marked the end of carpetbag misrule in the South.

Further up Main Street, away from the bend in the river that the courthouse faces, is the Colfax Cemetery. Only white people can be buried there, as is true of many small-town cemeteries throughout the South where custom, if not law, still prevails. In fact, there are no racially integrated burial grounds in all of Grant Parish.¹² Under an imposing old tree is a marble obelisk that looms above all the other granite markers. This stalwart, plain monument is dedicated to

⁹ Lane, *The Day Freedom Died*, 256; Lemann, *Redemption*, 24.

¹⁰ Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*, 8.

¹¹ “Unveiling Program,” *The Colfax Chronicle*, April 9, 1921, Ella V. Aldrich Schwing Papers, Mss. 3374, LLMVC. A document in the Schwing collection entitled “Historical” explains the significance of the pecan tree to local whites: “The last phase of the battle carries us back to the old pecan tree, where a body of about twenty-five negroes were overtaken and killed. This tree has recently been registered in the Hall of Fame, at Washington, D.C.”

¹² Richard Rubin, “The Colfax Riot,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (July/August 2003): 155–158.

white supremacy and the enshrined, collective memory of the Colfax Massacre in the Red River Region. The obelisk reads:

In Loving Remembrance
Erected To The Memory Of
The Heroes
Stephen Decatur Parish
James West Hadnot
Sidney Harris
Who Fell In The Colfax
Riot Fighting For
White Supremacy
April 13, 1873

For whites in Colfax, then as now, the events of April 13, 1873 signified the long-sought victory of white supremacy in the campaign to restore mastery and control to former slaveholders in the wake of surrender at Appomattox.

The brutal scenes and iconic memories that Colfax inculcated did not emerge from a historical or cultural void in 1873 or 1921. As this thesis has made clear, racial violence and brutal exploitation rested at the axis of the Red River's bloody history. From the 1820s when settlers began to migrate to the alluvial soil of northwest Louisiana, slavery, racial subordination, and a culture of white mastery defined the region. Slaves unlucky enough to be sold to a cotton planter on the Red or who relocated with their master, encountered a brutal order that reduced humans to little more than cash equivalents and laboring bodies. Slaves in the Red River region were, to use Walter Johnson's formulation, nothing more than people with a price.¹³ Paternalism did not exist on the holdings that stretched out from the Red's banks, and in singular contrast to entrenched parts of the southern plantation regime, slaves enjoyed very few customary practices—such as personal gardens and defined holidays—in northwest Louisiana. With the land and labor owned by an avaricious class of slaveholders who sought to extract maximum profit from the soil and from those that cultivated it, slavery on the Red River was violent, cold, brutal, and market-oriented. Slaveholding families—many of whom are chronicled in this thesis—flocked to the region to profit from the opportunities, comparatively cheap land, and access to the major market of New Orleans provided by the Red River. Committed to their own personal advancement, slaveholders like the Texadas, Fulliloves, Powells, Marshalls, and Marstons reaped a profitable harvest from the fields and the labor of their slaves. When the decisive 1860 election arrived, slaveholders and non-slaveholders in the Red River region flocked to the Confederate flag. The southern nation with the power structure of slavery and white supremacy at its core was a natural and emotive cause for Red River whites. As Alexander Stephens, the Vice President of the Confederacy, charged in March 1861 in his Cornerstone speech, the new southern government's "foundations are laid, its cornerstone

¹³ Johnson, *Soul by Soul* and *River of Dark Dreams*.

rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition.”¹⁴ Red River whites agreed fervently; Stephens’s cornerstone speech encapsulated their credo.

The Red River served as a natural boundary and artery of trade that had long isolated the region. Efforts to clear the Red of its snags and the impassable morass that made up the Raft remained a persistent and ongoing problem that stretched into the twentieth century. As the nation descended into Civil War, northwest Louisiana remained protected behind its watery shield. The region was never occupied and though its white population served proudly in the Confederate army with considerable loss of life, the Red River parishes remained untouched. Cotton, the South’s only export crop, was continually grown on wartime plantations throughout the area. The remarkable position and location enjoyed by northwest Louisiana ensured that it outfitted and provided the Confederacy with supplies ranging from salt to meat to medication and that its principal city, Shreveport, became both the headquarters of the Trans-Mississippi West and capital of the Confederate state of Louisiana. Although the southern portion of the state was Union occupied after the fall of New Orleans in April 1862, the Red River region remained formally apart and undefeated even when peace finally came in April 1865.

The region’s resilience and commitment to the tenets of the Confederacy exacerbated southern white reactions to Confederate defeat. Lincoln’s assassination ushered Andrew Johnson into the White House and under his lenient reconciliation and reunion agenda, white Louisianans began to limit African American prospects for freedom. Whether in the Black Codes or in landlords’ recalcitrant opposition to the Freedmen’s Bureau, whites along the Red River narrowed the pathways out of slavery for their former property. The onset of Radical Reconstruction and the passage of the racially liberal 1868 Louisiana constitution presented Red River whites with a direct political challenge to their long entrenched culture of mastery. When African Americans flocked to the polling booths, local whites responded violently and vituperatively. Through vigilante groups and White Leagues, former slaveholders unseated black Republican politics and returned the state to white, Democratic, home rule. White supremacy, the core cardinal test of every white southerner argued by U. B. Philips in the 1920s, drove this southern white counterrevolution and, as the bloody Colfax Massacre illustrated, the Red River would indeed run red with blood when local whites attacked freedpeople in the name of white power.¹⁵ The retreat from Reconstruction proved savage along the Red River, with thousands of freedpeople the victims of continuous paramilitary violence. White Republicans, most notably in the Coushatta Massacre, were killed at the hands of white supremacists. Former slaveholders adhered resiliently to the logic of racial oppression and the ideological inheritance of slavery continued to shape the manner in which white Louisianans

¹⁴ “Cornerstone Speech,” Civil War Memory, <http://cwmemory.com/2013/01/23/alexander-stephens-reinforces-the-cornerstone/>

¹⁵ Ulrich Philips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *AHR* 34, no. 1 (October 1928): 31.

thought about black people and conceived of their labor. This bitter inheritance from slavery continued to dictate race relations throughout Reconstruction and well into the twentieth century. For their part, Red River freedpeople fled the region as part of the colonization projects to Africa and the Exoduster movement to Kansas in the 1880s. As Henry Adams stated in 1874, it was “utterly impossible to live with the whites of Louisiana.”¹⁶

This thesis explains why Adams came to that conclusion. As the preceding chapters make clear, it is only by understanding the period from the 1820s to 1880s as one unbroken, sustained arc that the structural and ideological continuities that defined southern life and race relations can be understood and fathomed. The cotton complex lay at the heart of the capitalist transformation that placed the Red River region at the nexus of a transatlantic and national economic transformation that occurred alongside a social transformation that shaped the contours of enslavement. Committed to slavery and equally committed to the Confederacy, the Red River region remained resiliently bound to a race-based power structure that utilized violence to restrict African American freedoms. The continuities in racial thought and control from slavery to emancipation entrenched the logic of white supremacy and white power within the region and the unchecked violence of the Reconstruction era allowed Red River whites to act with impunity. The regional dynamics of power and prejudice, steeped in years of extractive slaveholding, were validated and upheld at the local, state, and national levels and solidified the narrow boundaries of African American emancipation. In northwest Louisiana, Red River blacks faced a powerful, committed phalanx. They discovered, at an enormous price, that whether under slavery or free labor, the region and its white leadership remained wholly unreconstructed.

¹⁶ “Testimony of Henry Adams Regarding the Negro Exodus,” in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (NY: Citadel Press, 1951), 715.

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Abbreviations

AAAG	Annals of the Association of American Geographers
ACP	American Cotton Planter & Soil of the South
AH	Agricultural History
AHQ	Arkansas Historical Quarterly
AHR	The American Historical Review
Basic	Basic Books
BP	Belknap Press
COUP	Columbia University Press
CP	Cornell University Press
CUP	Cambridge University Press
Doubleday	Doubleday & Company
EEH	Explorations in Economic History
FSG	Farrar, Strauss, & Giroux
HR	Harper & Row
HUP	Harvard University Press
HW	Hill & Wang
IUP	Indiana University Press
JAH	Journal of American History
JALA	Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association
JEH	Journal of Economic History
JER	Journal of the Early Republic
JHUP	Johns Hopkins University Press
JNH	Journal of Negro History
JSH	Journal of Southern History
JSHis	Journal of Social History
JWS	John Wiley & Sons
Knopf	Alfred A Knopf
LabH	Labor History
LH	Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association
LHQ	Louisiana Historical Quarterly
LSR	Law & Society Review
LSUP	Louisiana State University Press
MA	Military Affairs
McG	McGraw-Hill Book Co
NLH	North Louisiana History
NLHAJ	North Louisiana Historical Association Journal
Norton	WW Norton
OAH	OAH Magazine of History
OUP	Oxford University Press
PC	Public Culture
PUP	Princeton University Press
RHR	Radical History Review
RH	Random House
SA	Slavery and Abolition
SCHM	South Carolina Historical Magazine
SSH	Social Science History
SUP	Stanford University Press
TAMP	Texas A&M Press
TPP	Tipton Printing and Publishing
UALP	University of Alabama Press
UAP	University of Arkansas Press
UCAP	University of California Press

UCP	University of Chicago Press
UGA	University of Georgia Press
UILP	University of Illinois Press
UKP	University of Kentucky Press
UNCP	University of North Carolina Press
UOKP	University of Oklahoma Press
UPF	University Press of Florida
UPM	University Press of Mississippi
UPP	University of Pittsburgh Press
UPV	University Press of Virginia
USCP	University of South Carolina Press
UTNP	University of Tennessee Press
UTP	University of Texas Press
UVAP	University of Virginia Press
UWP	University of Wisconsin Press
WMQ	William & Mary Quarterly
YUP	Yale University Press

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